

# The Auburn Avenue Theology: A Biblical Critique

## Chapter 2: Other Romanizing Doctrines of the New Auburn Theology

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At the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's Conference four speakers—John Barach, Doug Wilson, Steve Schlissel and Steve Wilkins—articulated what they themselves called a new paradigm in theology. These men set forth this new paradigm as an answer to problems they perceived within Reformed theology as well as the inadequate manner in which they believe Reformed interpreters and theologians have dealt with “problem” passages in Scripture. The main theme of the conference centered on a new way to view the covenant which they referred to as “the objectivity of the covenant.” In their lectures numerous traditional, confessional Reformed doctrines were rejected and replaced by the novel ideas of the speakers. Some of the standard Reformed doctrines that were rejected or redefined were the following: the covenant of works, the distinction between the visible and invisible church, the nature of baptism (especially relating to efficacy), the doctrine of perseverance (we are repeatedly told that real believers can fall away), the doctrine of the atonement (the speakers repeatedly separate the ground of salvation from its application in an Arminian manner), justification (sometimes faith is defined in a Romish manner as an obedient or working faith [the Norman Shepherd heresy], at other times perseverance is defined in a manner that makes it either a partial ground of salvation or co-instrument in justification), and assurance (the main answer to problems of assurance [we are told] is baptismal regeneration: “Look to your baptism because you were really saved and united to Christ in your baptism”).

Because the new paradigm set forth by the Auburn “theologians” is a radical departure from the Reformed faith and is heretical in many areas, we will briefly examine some of the most perverse areas of their teaching. One area that will receive a great deal of attention is the Reformed doctrine of the atonement. The Auburn teaching is a repudiation of the classic Reformed formulation of this doctrine. It is our hope and prayer that this brief analysis of their perverse doctrines will inoculate Reformed believers against the Romanizing paradigm of the Auburn four.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Keep in mind that when we discuss the Auburn paradigm we are analyzing the views of the four different pastors. This approach carries several implications. a) The views of each one may not totally reflect the views of the other speakers. b) Some speakers may be more guarded or careful in their statements than others. c) Some speakers are more organized and systematic than others. Having said this, a careful reading of the separate lectures reveals a very strong similarity of thought on the part of each speaker. Further, this author is unaware of any of the separate speakers repudiating any of the comments made by the other speakers. In fact, Doug Wilson endorses a lecture by John Barach that contains serious theological perversions. It is very likely that these speakers were chosen for the pastor's conference precisely because they all had adopted similar theological views. Also, it is noteworthy that the same speakers came together for the Auburn Pastor's Conference in 2003 to clarify their positions. At the 2003 conference they did not repudiate any of their false doctrines but rather arrogantly defended their Romanizing innovations.

## The Church in its Two-fold Character as Visible and Invisible

Several false doctrines of the Auburn speakers are related to their rejection of the two-fold distinction of the church as visible and invisible. They must reject the two-fold character of the church because they teach that everyone baptized is regenerated, truly united to Christ and forgiven. The standard Reformed view, that there are people in the church who are never regenerated and never have true saving faith, must be set aside to uphold the Auburn definition of baptism and their doctrine of the objectivity of the covenant. As we defend the traditional Reformed understanding of this doctrine we will interact to some degree with Doug Wilson's false caricature of the orthodox view.

Before we begin an analysis of the two-fold character of the church it is important to note that some very important doctrines are based on logical inference from Scripture (e.g., the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, the Trinity, infant baptism, etc.). This observation is necessary because opponents of the doctrine of the two-fold character of the church will often point out that the terms "visible" and "invisible" are not found in the Bible and thus are an artificial construct of the Protestant Reformers. It is often then asserted that the Bible only speaks of the church as visible, local and particular. While the choice of the terms "visible" and "invisible" may be confusing to some, the two-fold distinction they represent is taught in God's word and is vital for understanding Christ's church. Indeed, without this distinction, many teachings of the Bible appear contradictory and incomprehensible. Therefore, as we compare Scripture to Scripture and analyze the nature of the church in relation to other doctrines that help define the church, we will see that the Reformed teaching regarding the two-fold nature of the church is necessary logically, theologically and exegetically. One can replace the terms "visible" and "invisible"; however, the ideas they represent cannot be replaced without disastrous theological consequences.

The best and most succinct statement of the church as invisible and visible is found in the Westminster Standards. Chapter 25, "Of the Church," states: "The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that fills all in all. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (sections 1, 2).

Before we proceed with more detailed considerations regarding the two-fold aspect of the church, some common misconceptions regarding this teaching need to be addressed. One common misconception of the church as visible and invisible is that this doctrine teaches that there are two separate churches. For example, Doug Wilson says, "But we also know from our Bibles that there is only one church, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. So we've got two churches with two different rosters of names. . . . Now if you've got two churches existing at the same time with different names on their membership rolls, the question that comes up, and it may not come up consciously, but the question is: which one is the real church?" (Doug Wilson, *Visible and Invisible Church Revisited*, tape 2). This false caricature of the Reformed doctrine of the church as visible and invisible ignores the fact that Reformed theologians emphasize that this

distinction does *not* mean that God has two separate churches.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, they assert that Jehovah has founded one church, that Jesus has only *one* bride, people, church, or body. Our Lord does not have two churches but only one. The terms “invisible” and “visible” are used to describe two distinct aspects of the one church; or, to put it another way, the church is considered from two different perspectives. These different aspects or perspectives will be considered in a moment.

Another false conception of the visible-invisible distinction is that they represent two completely separate categories. Note the false caricature of the two-fold distinction by Doug Wilson. He says, “When we say visible and invisible, we divide into categories, visible is down here [i.e., on earth] and invisible is an ethereal church in the heavenlies [i.e., in heaven]. We create an ontological [i.e., self-contained or totally separate] division between visible down here and invisible in heaven” (*Visible and Invisible Church Revisited*, Tape 2). Wilson goes on to accuse the confessional view of the two-fold aspect of the church as being Hellenistic (i.e., based on a Greek philosophical mind-set), Platonic (i.e., that which is of the earth is separate and inferior to that which is heavenly and spiritual), and Gnostic. In context it appears that Wilson is accusing the classic Protestant position of being against history, against the church working in time and on earth for godly dominion. Aside from the fact that Wilson is using the word “Gnostic” improperly the idea that the Reformers, Puritans and early Presbyterians were Gnostic or against progressive sanctification is completely untrue.

The confessional position of the church as invisible and visible is not that there are two separate air-tight categories with one group on heaven and another on earth. On the contrary, there is a great overlap between both categories. All *genuine* believers are members of the invisible church whether they are living in heaven or on earth, whether they are alive or dead (i.e., have died physically). Not all professing Christians, however, who are members of the visible church, are members of the invisible church. Some people who make a profession of faith and are baptized are hypocrites. Such people do not really believe in Christ (thus are never truly united to Him by faith) and are not part of the invisible church. This reality will receive further elucidation below.

The term “invisible” as defined by the Reformed symbols and theologians does not mean that some Christians are invisible like ghosts floating around in the spirit realm. It refers to the fact that the invisible church cannot be fully discovered, distinguished or discerned by the eyes of men, by empirical means. There are a number of reasons why this statement cannot be denied. a) No one has the ability to look into the human heart and see if a person is truly united to Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. That reality is the reason that, historically, Presbyterian churches have admitted members upon a credible profession of faith. b) The inward, effectual calling of the Spirit and the application of redemption to the human soul are all spiritual, unseen events. Further, the Holy Spirit gives genuine saving faith only to the elect. The counterfeit faith of unregenerate professors of religion often is indiscernible to mere mortals. We can only perceive outward signs, statements and actions. No person has the ability to determine or observe the whole body of God’s elect irrespective of time (i.e., throughout human history prior to the

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<sup>2</sup>Reformed theologians who emphasize or teach this point are: Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Edmonton, AB, Can.: Still Waters Revival Books, n. d., [1845]), 261. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1969 [1869]), 1:29. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 3:8ff. A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1958 [1869]), 310ff. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 565-566. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 187-189. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 665ff.

last judgment) or place (i.e., there are many real believers in the world of which we are not aware). Williamson writes, “It is invisible *to us* because it has extension in both time and space. It reaches from one end of the earth to the other, and from the beginning to the end of the age. *But it is invisible only to us. It is not invisible to God.* He who infallibly discerns the hearts of men, knows them that are his. ‘The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: the Lord knoweth them that are his’ (II Tim. 2:19).”<sup>3</sup> Jesus prayed for the invisible church—the elect present and not yet born in John 17. “Christ is speaking of a *special* company which had been given to Him. The reference, then, is to the sovereign election of God, whereby He chose a definite number to be His ‘peculiar people’—His in a peculiar or special way. These are *eternally* His: ‘chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4); and by the immutability of His purpose of grace (Rom. 11:29), they are *always* His.”<sup>4</sup>

The visible church is designated “visible” because it is discernable by the senses, by empirical means. It consists of everyone who *professes* the true religion along with their children. Because men do not have the ability to see into the minds of men and read the human heart, anyone who professes Jesus Christ in credible manner (i.e., he has a knowledge of the gospel, he is orthodox in doctrine, he professes faith in Christ and repentance toward God, he is not as far as anyone is aware committing habitual or scandalous sins) is allowed to join the church along with his children. In the visible church there are genuine believers who are truly united to Christ and false professors or hypocrites who only taste of heavenly gifts but do not really partake of the Savior. Their relationship to Him is only outward. “On this account the church is compared to a *floor*, in which there is not only wheat but also chaff (Matt. iii. 12); to a *field*, where tares as well as good seed are sown (Matt. xiii. 24, 25); to a *net*, which gathers bad fish together with the good (ver. 47); to a *great house*, in which are vessels of every kind some to honour and some to dishonor,—2 Tim. ii. 20.”<sup>5</sup> People who are members of the visible church yet who never *truly* believe in Christ receive the outward privileges of membership (fellowship, the word, the sacraments and the guidance of church government), but are never regenerated, saved, forgiven, united to Christ and spiritually sanctified. The blood of Jesus never washes away their sins.

The visible church is set apart from the world by profession as well as its external government, discipline, and ordinances (e.g., the preached word and the sacraments). The members of the visible church have obeyed the outward call of the gospel, professing Christ, submitting to baptism and placing themselves under the preaching and authority of the local church. All such persons who obey the outward call of the gospel place themselves in covenant with God. They have separated themselves from the world and at least *outwardly* enjoy the privileges of being members of the visible church (e.g., the teaching of the word, godly guidance, the fellowship of the saints, etc.). While in a certain sense those who outwardly profess the truth participate in an *external covenant* with real responsibilities and privileges, it does not mean and theologically cannot mean that they truly participate in the saving merits of Christ. Such persons (for a time) are *in* the covenant but are never genuinely *of* the covenant. They participate in the covenant externally as professors of the true religion, but they never participate in the covenant of grace which flows from the eternal covenant of redemption. The Auburn “theologians” speak of the objectivity or reality of the covenant in radically different terms than Reformed theologians. Apparently, the Auburn speakers do not recognize the reality of the covenant if

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<sup>3</sup> G. I. Williamson, *The Confession of Faith*, 187; emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975 [1945]), 3:11.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, 263.

salvation or forgiveness by the blood of Christ is not involved. This view is related to their doctrine of baptismal regeneration and their idea that real believers can apostatize (these views are dealt with below.).

It needs to be recognized that although God deals with the visible church as one church, as one people of God, the external administration of the church with the preaching of the word, the ordinances and discipline in the present and in the long run (e.g., after the final judgment, in the eternal state) only truly benefit the invisible church or the elect. While outward professors receive *temporary benefits* resulting from intellectual insights from the word, pressure to conform to God's law, the outward influence from a society of family-oriented, ethical people, etc., they receive greater damnation on the day of judgment for spurning the great light to which they were exposed under continual gospel preaching. The Auburn teaching that everyone baptized who is in the (visible) church is loved, saved, forgiven and has the Holy Spirit<sup>6</sup>, even if he or she later rejects Jesus and goes to hell, is unbiblical and exegetically and theologically impossible (as we shall see in a moment).

Before we turn our attention to the Auburn perversion of the doctrine of the atonement, let us examine a few passages of Scripture that strongly support the traditional view of the church as visible and invisible. These passages disprove the Auburn teaching that everyone baptized is truly united to Christ and thus receives the "full benefits of salvation." Indeed, these passages are incomprehensible apart from the confessional teaching regarding the two-fold aspect of the church.

The first such passage is 1 John 2:19-20: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things." In this passage John discusses certain persons who at one time had professed apostolic doctrine and were members of the church. According to the Auburn paradigm these people were truly united to Christ; their sins were forgiven and they were just as much true members of the church as anyone. As baptized members of the church (we are told) these people were the elect of God.<sup>7</sup> But in truth, these people apostatized; that is, they abandoned the form of sound doctrine taught to them by the apostles and their associates and adopted a form of Gnosticism. As a result they left the church, probably to associate with like-minded heretical anti-christs.

Note the Spirit-inspired analysis of the apostle John regarding this all too common situation. John says, "They were not of us." That is, they were never genuine members of the

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<sup>6</sup> "How could you know you are in Him? God gave you the seal and sign of baptism. He gave you that rite that brought you into Christ and you can look and you can trust that God's promises are objective" (John Barach, *Covenant and Election*, tape 6). " . . . [S]ome persons, not destined for final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real blessings, *purchased for them by Christ's cross and applied to them by the Holy Spirit* through Word and Sacrament....Saul received the *same* initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance.... In one sense, all those in the covenant are 'saved.' They have been delivered out of the world and brought into the glorious *new creation of Christ*, but not all will persevere in that 'salvation'" (*Summary Statement of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation*, emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> "Traditionally, the Reformed have said, we have to view our children as presumptively elect or presumptively regenerate. And therefore, Christian, if we are willing to take the Scriptures at face value, there is no presumption necessary. Just take the Bible. And this is true, of course, because by the baptism, by baptism the Spirit joins us to Christ since he is the elect one and the Church is the elect people, we are joined to his body. We therefore are elect. Since he is the justified one, we are justified in him. Since he is the beloved one, we are beloved in him." (Steve Wilkins, *Half-Way Covenant*, tape 11).

church. While it is true that they were baptized and professed the true religion, they were never united to Christ or saved. They were chaff on the same floor as wheat (Mt. 3:12), or tares among the wheat (Mt. 13:24-25). They were members of the visible church but never of the invisible church. In this context John uses the term “us” (*emon*) in the sense of true Christians. The apostle makes two observations, both of which totally contradict the Auburn teaching.<sup>8</sup> First, he says that true Christians or members of the invisible church cannot apostatize: “for if they were of us [i.e., true believers], they would have continued with us.” The fact that these professing Christians departed from the church is empirical proof that they were never *true* Christians. “They went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” “The meaning here is that secession proves a want of fundamental union from the rest.”<sup>9</sup> Second, John says that true believers have received the Holy Spirit from Christ which secures them against apostasy or desertion: “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” True believers or members of the invisible church cannot fall away because they are baptized with the Holy Spirit and thus permanently abide *in* Christ (see 1 Jn. 2:27; 5:4). Our Lord concurs, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (Jn. 10:27-28).

1 Jn. 2:19-20 thus teaches: (1) the church is composed of true and false believers; and (2) the doctrine of perseverance. True Christians are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and can never apostatize while those who are *not* baptized in the Spirit and not united to the Savior can. “Their presence in the visible church was temporary, for they failed in their perseverance. If they had been members of the invisible church, they would have remained with the body of believers”<sup>10</sup>

A second passage is Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I *never* knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” After warning His disciples of the danger of false prophets, our Lord warns them of the consequences of a false profession of religion. He describes people who profess Christ; who acknowledge His Lordship; who are even engaged in some type of Christian service; yet who never had a saving relationship to Jesus. These people were obviously members of the visible church. But, they were never truly united to the Lord or saved; they were never members of the invisible church.

This section of Scripture contradicts Arminianism, which teaches that, if people accept Jesus as Savior, they are truly saved but can later reject the faith and fall away. It also explicitly contradicts the Auburn teaching that people who profess Christ and are baptized are really united to Him, loved by Him and forgiven by Him even if they are not among the elect (individually)

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<sup>8</sup>For example, John Barach says, “Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union then with Christ and with the triune God. The Bible doesn’t know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant—really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks about the reality, efficacy, of baptism. Every baptized person is in Christ and therefore shares in His new life.... We need to say [to every baptized person] Jesus died for you personally and we mean it, to them, head for head, every one of them” (*Covenant and History*, tape 3).

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1886]), 58.

<sup>10</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker, *James and I-III John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 277.

and thus eventually fall away.<sup>11</sup> Note, Jesus says to all false professors of religion on the day of judgment, “I *never* knew you.” Since God is omniscient, the word “knew” in this context does not refer to a mere intellectual knowledge (e.g., in John’s gospel see: 1:47, 49; 2:24, 25; 21:17). Rather the term “knew” in this passage is used in the Hebraic sense of love, acknowledgment, friendship, intimate fellowship. Our Lord says that everyone in the visible church who is not really saved (i.e., they do not have true saving faith and the works that demonstrate the reality of that faith.) never, ever (i.e., not even for a single moment) had a relationship or vital union with Him. There is no other way that the Savior’s words can be interpreted without doing violence to the text of Scripture. Although Jesus’ words are in complete harmony with the classic Protestant distinction between the visible and invisible church, they cannot be harmonized with the new Auburn theological innovations. The Auburn “theologians” must either abandon their position or assert that the Bible can teach doctrines that totally contradict one another.

A third passage is Romans 9:6: “But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.” In the epistle to the Romans, Paul explicitly recognized the two-fold aspect of the church when he explains why the majority of the old covenant people of God did not embrace their Messiah.

In order properly to understand Romans 9:6, we briefly need to consider the context. In Romans chapter 8 Paul elaborates on the major theme that all those who are in Christ shall never be condemned. Believers are delivered from the law by Jesus’ death. They are freed from the pollution of sin by the indwelling power of the Spirit. The Spirit’s power also guarantees a believer’s resurrection and glorification. Christians have their assurance rooted in their union with Christ. There also is the comfort of the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Toward the end of the chapter the safety and assurance of believers is founded upon God’s electing love from eternity. Here the apostle discusses the unbreakable chain of the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) and the fact that “if God is for us, who can be against us?”

In chapter 9, as Paul turns his attention to the design of God in reference to Jews and Gentiles, he needs to answer the question: “What about Israel?” If election and perseverance are rooted in the eternal-unchanging love of God, how can the mass apostasy of the Jewish people be explained? They were God’s people, the church, who received the word, the promises, the sacraments and ordinances. Does not God’s rejection of the Jewish nation contradict the promises to Abraham and the perseverance promised in chapter 8? No, absolutely not! The apostle explains that it is to *true* Israel (i.e., the elect or the invisible church) that the promises are made. It is to these people only that God’s eternal electing love is directed. There is national election—the nation of Israel or the visible church—and within Israel, the visible church, there is true Israel—the invisible church. The Jews who did not reject the Messiah are “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5).

According to the Auburn theological scheme everyone who is baptized is truly united to Christ, loved by Him and has his sins forgiven. The people who are united to Christ, who are forgiven by Jesus’ blood, can (we are told) really fall away and be lost. The major deciding issue regarding salvation in their system is whether or not a baptized person perseveres in the covenant.<sup>12</sup> Note that the apostle Paul completely rejects the Auburn paradigm.

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<sup>11</sup>“Baptism means that the one baptized has a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, the one baptized has been grafted into Christ, he has the sign and seal of regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and the obligation to walk in newness of life” (Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough* [Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002], 103).

<sup>12</sup>“ . . . [S]ome persons, not destined for final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real blessings, *purchased for them by Christ’s cross* and *applied to them by the Holy*

For Paul, there is true Israel (the elect, the invisible church, the remnant) within national Israel (the visible church). In other words the elect or the invisible church is hidden in the visible church. Further, when describing why the church is composed of true Israel (i.e., real believers) and false Israel (i.e., hypocrites) the apostle turns our attention to the doctrine of election. If the Auburn theology were scriptural we would expect Paul to discuss how God was in intimate union with all circumcised Jews, that God really loved them all, but that many simply did not persevere. Instead, Paul discusses the twin brothers Jacob and Esau. These twins were conceived at the same moment and were born only minutes apart. Both were covenant children born of the patriarch Isaac. Both received circumcision and were part of the visible church—the covenant people of God. Since Esau was circumcised does Paul argue that he was loved and forgiven by God? No. God hated Esau before he was even born (Rom. 9:11-13). Although Esau was a circumcised member of the visible church, he was never united to Christ, loved by God or forgiven. Instead, he was a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction (Rom. 9:22). Esau’s circumcision was never efficacious because he was never regenerated and given the gift of saving faith. As Paul says, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15).

Yet another section of Scripture which totally disproves the Auburn paradigm is 2 Peter 2. This chapter describes men who at one time were baptized, members in good standing and who had even become teachers. According to the Auburn “theologians” these men who were baptized were loved by Christ, their sins were forgiven and they even had received an interior special work of grace by the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Peter, however, does not say that they were loved or forgiven but that they for a time “escaped the pollutions of the world” (2 Pet. 2:20). That is, they had an external reformation of behavior based on an intellectual knowledge of the word. Peter makes it crystal clear that these men were *not* united to Christ, regenerated, forgiven or saved because he says their natures were *never, ever* truly changed. He says, “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Pet. 2:22). A dog and a pig act according to their own nature. One can wash a pig and make it clean, but a pig is a pig. It will return to wallowing in the mud—in disgusting filth—because that is what pigs do. The apostle is saying that people who apostatize, who return to their former lifestyle, *never* had an interior work of the Holy Spirit. They were never regenerated and united to Christ. *Their natures were never changed.* The apostle apparently hadn’t listened to Steve Wilkins and his comrades and learned that baptism is always efficacious. The apostle is, in fact, teaching that if we could look at the hearts of those who apostatized, “we would discover that at no time were they ever activated by a true love of

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*Spirit* through Word and Sacrament.... Saul received the *same* initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance.... In one sense, all those in the covenant are ‘saved.’ They have been delivered out of the world and brought into the glorious *new creation of Christ*, but not all will persevere in that ‘salvation’” (*Summary Statement of the Auburn Ave. Presbyterian Church’s Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation*, emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup>“The Bible teaches us that baptism unites us [Wilkins believes that baptism is efficacious to everyone baptized] to Christ and by his, and to his body the power of the spirit. By one spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we’ve all been made to drink of one Spirit. Paul says that at baptism you are clothed with Christ Jesus. For as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union. The clothes make the man. With our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings. Union with Christ is union with the church, his body” (Steve Wilkins, *Half Way Covenant*, tape 11).

God. They were all this while goats, and not sheep, ravening wolves, and not gentle lambs.”<sup>14</sup> In other words the visible church contains not only real believers but also unsaved hypocrites.

## The Auburn Paradigm Destroys the Biblical Doctrine of the Atonement

A doctrine that suffers great abuse in the Auburn system is the doctrine of the atonement. The Auburn speakers’ adoption of baptismal regeneration and the idea that people who are really united to Christ and forgiven by His blood can apostatize and go to hell, cannot be harmonized with the Reformed understanding of Christ’s atoning work. Note for example, the theologically perverse statement from the session of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (September, 2002). It reads: “By baptism one is joined to Christ’s body, united to Him covenantally, and *given all the blessings and benefits of His work* (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff.; WSC #94). This does not, however, grant to the baptized final salvation; rather, it obligates him to fulfill the terms of the covenant. . . . In some sense, they [those ‘united to Him in the church by baptism’] were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ’s blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit” (emphasis added).

This statement is a denial of the Reformed understanding of the atonement. What is it regarding the Reformed doctrine of Jesus’ death that sets it apart from Arminianism, semi-Pelagianism and Romanism? There are a number of important differences.

First, note that our Lord’s death was limited or definite. This does not mean limited in its power to save but rather in its extent. Christ died only for the elect. His saving merits do not benefit the non-elect in any direct way whatsoever. (There are indirect benefits such as the improvement of society. However, these temporary blessings bring greater condemnation to the non-elect on the day of judgment.) Note that already the Auburn theology is outside the pale of Reformed confessional orthodoxy because it applies “all the blessings and benefits” of Jesus’ work directly to people who are non-elect and destined for hell.

Secondly, Reformed theologians have always acknowledged that Christ’s redemptive work not only removes the guilt and penalty of sin (expiation), eliminates God’s wrath (propitiation), and restores fellowship with God (reconciliation) but also merits the *application* of redemption to the sinner as well (regeneration, sanctification and glorification). Christ purchased all the spiritual graces for His people. God “has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3). Our Lord’s perfect redemption is the fountain out of which flows regeneration, faith, repentance and sanctification. Union with Christ in His life, death and resurrection guarantees that the elect sinner will be regenerated, sanctified and glorified. “When Christ lived, died, was buried, arose, ascended, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, we are told that the ones for whom He did these things are to be viewed as being in such a life union with Him as their covenant head and representative that it is said that they lived, died, were buried, arose, ascended and sat down at the Father’s side ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Eph. 2:5-6).”<sup>15</sup> Christ saves His people from the guilt (justification) as well as the power of sin (sanctification). Everyone united to Christ will receive the gifts of faith (Eph. 2:8) and repentance (Ac. 5:31; 11:18). There is nothing esoteric regarding this teaching; it is standard Reformed confessional orthodoxy.

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<sup>14</sup>Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979 [1932]), 192.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub. 1989), 64.

The Reformed doctrine of the atonement, however, possesses a number of exegetical, theological and logical problems for the Auburn paradigm. For example, the Auburn “theologians” say that everyone who is baptized is united to Christ and “given all the blessings and benefits of His work.” But such people (we are told) even though they are united to Christ and receive “all the blessings” including “new life by the Spirit” and forgiveness of sins, can go to hell if they do not fulfill the terms of the covenant. This assertion raises a few obvious questions. Does not union with Christ in His life, death and resurrection inexorably lead to a person’s justification, sanctification and glorification? Doesn’t Paul teach in Romans 6 that everyone united to Christ *is* sanctified? In other words, our Lord’s work does not make sanctification a possibility but a reality for every Christian. Can a person who is sanctified in Christ (i.e., not merely externally set apart but made holy) apostatize and go to hell? No. He is sealed by the Holy Spirit and preserved by His power (Phil. 1:6; 2:13). Doesn’t the apostle Paul teach that *everyone* united to Christ will receive a glorified body in the resurrection that is designed to dwell in the presence of God forever? Yes, he certainly does (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 45-58; Rom. 8:23, 29).

The Auburn “theologians” also need to explain the role of regeneration in their system. The Bible explicitly teaches that everyone united to Christ is regenerated (Eph. 2:5). Regeneration is the beginning, the starting point, the fountain of all the saving graces which are subjectively applied to the sinner. Being born again *invariably* will lead to a person becoming a spiritual person (Jn. 3:6). Regeneration will without fail lead to conversion. Regeneration always leads to saving faith, repentance and sanctification (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 4:6; Ac. 5:21; 11:18; 16:13-14; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9). Regeneration is also connected in Scripture to perseverance, for John says that a person who is born again cannot habitually continue in sin (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; cf. 5:4). The Bible says that everyone who is born again cannot be harmed by the second death (Rev. 20:6).

These teachings raise even more questions for the Auburn “theologians.” Are the people who (according to their system) are united to Christ yet apostatize and go to hell regenerated? If they are regenerated, then how can they apostatize when the Bible emphatically declares that the regenerate can never reject the faith or go to hell? If they are *not* regenerated then: (1) How can they be said to be united to Christ (i.e., not merely united externally to the church but united mystically with the Savior)? (2) How can they believe in Jesus when they are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), hate the truth and Christ (Jn. 3:19-21), dwell in darkness (Jn. 1:4-5), have an uncircumcised heart of stone (Ezek 11:19; 36:26), cannot repent (Jer. 13:23), cannot comprehend divine truth (1 Cor. 2:14) and are slaves to Satan (Ac. 26:17-18)? Obviously people who are not regenerated cannot exercise saving faith. Therefore, if they do make a profession of faith and are baptized, they are unsaved hypocrites. They are white-washed tombs (Mt. 23:27) whose covenant father is not God but Satan (Jn. 8:44). Further, are not regeneration, saving faith, perseverance and glorification the “blessings and benefits” of our Lord’s work? How then can a person be united to Christ and receive “all the benefits” of Jesus’ work and yet not believe, persevere and be glorified? Such thinking is blatantly self-contradicting and absurd. (Keep in mind that this irrational theological nonsense is found in a carefully crafted statement from a church session written to clarify their doctrine, to make sure people consider them to be orthodox.)

Moreover, Paul presents the elements or order of salvation as an unbreakable chain that cannot be separated by any created thing (Rom. 8:30-39). The three actions of Romans 8:30 (called, justified and glorified) which inevitably flow from God’s eternal counsel cannot be torn

apart. “The future glorification of the believer is designated by the aorist, as his justification, calling, predestination, and election and have been; because all these divine acts are eternal, and therefore simultaneous for the divine mind. All are equally certain.”<sup>16</sup> “Election does not carry man half way only; it carries him all the way. It does not merely bring him to conversion; it brings him to perfection.”<sup>17</sup>

The Auburn “theologians” cannot simply ignore the explicit teaching of Paul by claiming that election is a mystery or by saying that the apostle is describing salvation from God’s viewpoint. Paul is discussing how God’s electing love works itself out in history; or, how God’s foreknowledge causes specific people to be effectually called, justified and glorified. There is absolutely no room in Paul’s thought for the idea that people who are loved by Christ, united to Him and forgiven can apostatize and go to hell. The Auburn “theologians” must either accept the Reformed concept of the visible and invisible church or they must create out of thin air a category of people who are simultaneously saved, loved and forgiven and yet unsaved, hated and damned.

If those who eventually fall away do not have the gift of faith (as the Auburn Avenue session asserts) then how do they appropriate Christ and receive the forgiveness of sins? One must either assert (as in Arminianism and semi-Pelagianism) that some people have genuine faith and are truly saved yet can lose saving faith; or, one must hold to the position that false faith can be an instrumental means of laying hold of the Savior. People either believe and are saved, or they do not really believe and are not saved. The Auburn “theologians” must explain how people who are non-elect, who do not have the gift of faith, are “saved,” “redeemed,” “united to Christ,” and really forgiven by Jesus’ blood.<sup>18</sup> Their false understanding of baptism and the church has led them to develop a whole new category of people that are temporarily saved (by “saved” they do not merely mean an outward reformation of life but real forgiveness). These are people who are unregenerate, without saving faith, non-elect, and without perseverance yet who, according to the Auburn “theologians,” are united to Christ and partakers of His blood. While the Auburn “theologians” can declare their loyalty to the Reformed faith and the five points of Calvinism all they want, their system is a *radical departure* from the Reformed faith.

Another aspect of Jesus’ atoning work that reveals the absurdity of the Auburn theology is our Lord’s work as a priest. Christ’s bloody death and His high priestly work go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. Therefore, the Auburn theological assertion that there are people who are united to Christ, loved by Him, who are saved and have their sins removed, yet who can apostatize and go to hell, is theologically impossible. Why? Because our Lord intercedes for

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<sup>16</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1879]), 266.

<sup>17</sup>John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism* (Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1984 [1890]), 78.

<sup>18</sup>Steve Wilkins says, “If we do not persevere, we lose the blessings that were given to us in God’s covenant. Thus, when one breaks the covenant, it can be truly said, he has turned away from grace and forfeited life, forgiveness, and salvation.... *the apostate lose the forgiveness that was theirs really and truly in the covenant* ...they are viewed as being in possession of this great salvation but of allowing it to ‘slip away’ ...they may enjoy for a season many of the blessings of the covenant, including *the forgiveness of sins*, adoption, possession of the kingdom, sanctification, etc., and yet apostatize and fall short of the grace of God ...That which makes apostasy so horrible is that these blessings actually belonged to the apostates.... They lose something they actually possessed .... The distinction of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ union are invented and not in the text [Jn. 15:1-8]” (*The Covenant and Apostasy*, Tape 1). John Barach says, “Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union with Christ and with the triune God .... We need to say to everyone, to say [to every baptized person] Jesus died for you personally and we mean it, to them, head for head, every one of them” (*Covenant and History*, tape 3).

everyone for whom He died and His intercession is efficacious. It cannot fail. "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn. 2:1). "He continues forever [and] has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:24-25). "This special intercession of the Lord Jesus is one grand secret of the believer's safety. He is daily watched, and thought for, and provided for with unfailing care, by One whose eye never slumbers and never sleeps. Jesus is 'able to save them to the uttermost those who come unto Him, because he every liveth to make intercession for them' (Heb. vii. 25). They never perish, because He never ceases to pray for them, and His prayer must prevail. *They stand and persevere to the end, not because of their own strength and goodness, but because Jesus intercedes for them.* When Judas fell never to rise again, while Peter fell, but repented, and was restored, the reason of the difference lay under those words of Christ to Peter, 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not' (Luke xxxii. 32)"<sup>19</sup>

According to the Auburn theology, people who are baptized and united to Christ are forgiven and loved by Him even though they are not elect and fall away. But (we ask) if these people are cleansed by Jesus' blood and loved by Him, *why* doesn't our Lord intercede for them? If He loves them, *why* doesn't He pray for them? If he loves them, *why* does He sit by and watch them go to hell? Whatever, then, the Auburn "theologians" say regarding Christ's love toward those who apostatize, who do not have the "additional gift of perseverance," "it is a love which does not secure their salvation: it is not a saving love. It is not equal to the love which mother cherishes for her child. She would save him if she could. This reputed divine love may be called a special love, but it is not the love for his saints which the Scriptures assign to God. The idea of it was not born of inspiration: God never claimed such love as his own."<sup>20</sup> The fact that some people in the visible church do not have genuine faith and thus fall away is not a problem for orthodox Calvinists. The Auburn "theologians," however, must assert that Jesus simultaneously loves and doesn't love the same people. They place a gross disharmony between Jesus' sacrifice and His work of intercession.

Once again the Auburn "theologians" divide the atonement into various pieces and then arbitrarily apply some of the pieces to their new category of the semi-saved Christian. In Reformed confessional Christianity the atonement is a seamless garment. Christ and His work are not and cannot be divided.

Another feature of the Auburn theology that perverts the doctrine of the atonement is the idea that non-elect people who are baptized are said to have their sins forgiven even though they do not persevere and thus go to hell. This assertion needs to be explained. When it is asserted that their sins are forgiven or eliminated by Jesus' blood, does this mean that all of their sins are forgiven? If all of their sins are forgiven then why do they go to hell? Does God require that the same sins be punished twice, once in the Savior and then again in those who do not persevere? No. God is perfectly righteous, just and holy. Then perhaps the Auburn "theologians" are teaching that our Lord washes away some sins by His blood yet leaves others behind. The problem with this view is that: (1) Scripture teaches that Christ removes *all* the guilt and penalty of sin by His blood; and, (2) a person who had some sins removed, while other still remains, is not saved but damned, for he still has the guilt of some sins to answer for. Perhaps the Auburn "theologians" are teaching that a person has his sins washed away at baptism and thus for a time

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<sup>19</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (England, James Clark, 1976), 3:205. Emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup>John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 69.

is completely forgiven, but once he apostatizes the efficacy of Jesus' blood is removed and new sins are charged to his account. The problem with this view is two-fold. (1) As noted earlier, it divides the expiatory, propitiatory aspect of our Lord's work from its application. Christ's redemptive work *merits* every aspect of salvation in its fullest sense. The Savior's redemptive work cannot be divided as if it were a pie. (2) It is an implicit denial of the biblical doctrine of justification. For a person to have his sins removed he must be justified (that is declared righteous in the heavenly court by God the Father based on the merits of Jesus Christ). Justification is a one-time, non-repeatable event. A person who is justified has the guilt and penalty of all his sins (past, present and *future*) imputed to Christ on the cross. The Lord's perfect righteousness is then imputed to the believing sinner. How (we ask) can someone who has all the guilt and penalty of his sins removed, who is clothed with the righteousness of the Son of God, go to hell? Can a person be justified one moment and not the next? Can a person be justified, then fall away, then be justified again? The Auburn theology in many respects has more in common with Arminianism than historic Calvinism.

Further, if one holds to the Auburn understanding of baptism and union with Christ, then why not return to the common fourth-century practice of postponing baptism until one is on his deathbed? This would greatly lessen the possibility of losing one's salvation. Or better yet, get baptized, and immediately become a missionary in western Pakistan. The end may come painfully, but it is much better than living with the real possibility that some damnable sins will be placed on one's account later in life.

Is it not becoming clear that the Auburn "theologians" attempt to mix the corrupt oil of medieval theology (e.g., baptismal regeneration) with the pure water of the gospel does not and cannot work? Given the popularity of the Auburn speakers and the wide dissemination of their false doctrines, it is not enough for these men to backtrack a little and proclaim their faithfulness to the five points of Calvinism. They must publicly repent of their heretical teachings and ask forgiveness for corrupting the body of Christ with theological poison.<sup>21</sup>

The Auburnites' view of the work of the Holy Spirit in professing Christians who do not persevere and thus go to hell also contradicts the biblical doctrine of atonement. The Reformed view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the elect is that His power to save is invincible. The grace of God is irresistible, effectual, unconquerable and certain. The Holy Spirit regenerates a person's heart, effectually applies God's word to the mind (1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18), actively draws the regenerated person toward the truth (Jn. 6:44), and preserves the regenerated sinner until the great day (Phil. 1:6; 2:13). The Holy Spirit's work in regenerating, effectually calling, and preserving believers is founded upon the objective work of Christ. Redemption is applied only to the elect. Because the Auburn "theologians" have a unique view of the sacraments and the covenant, they must compromise the effectual and certain nature of the Spirit's work.

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<sup>21</sup>Note Doug Wilson's ringing endorsement of the doctrine of perseverance: "In one exegetical debate between an average Arminian, who has checked out the Scripture and the average Calvinist, who has checked out his system, the average Arminian is going eat that Calvinist's lunch when it comes to the perseverance of the saints. Now perseverance, this is difficult because the perseverance of the saints is the one point of Calvinism that is popular. All right, all the rest we hate the more, yes, we hate them. Perseverance, you mean I can't lose my salvation once I get saved? I can't lose it? Who? Well, but that is the most popular tenet of Calvinism and when you are looking at the Scripture as they present themselves to us *in the light of our system*, it is the least defensible" (*Visible and Invisible Church Revisited*, tape 2). Well, Mr. Wilson, since you regard this precious Reformed doctrine as having little or no support, let us refresh your memory. Sit down and read the following passages: Ps. 37:28; 121:3, 7-8; Jer. 32:40; Mt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22; Jn. 6:39; 10:27-29; 17:11; Rom. 14:4; 16:25; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 5:28; Phil. 1:6; 1 Th. 5:23-24; 2 Th. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; Jude 1, 24, etc.

Furthermore, another doctrine related to the atonement that is destroyed by the Auburn paradigm is definitive sanctification. According to the apostle, what is the foundation of a believer's personal godliness and perseverance in holiness? Is it his intrinsic ability to keep the covenant? Is it the water of baptism? No. It is by virtue of a believer's intimate union with Christ in His death and resurrection that the Christian has been delivered from the power of sin. For Paul, all the imperatives relating to a Christian's progressive sanctification are grounded upon definitive sanctification which is the direct result of union with Christ. In the most detailed and systematic discussion of sanctification in the New Testament (Romans 6:1-7:6), Paul teaches that Jesus' death is the reason that Christians have died to the reigning, enslaving, defiling power of sin. His resurrection is the reason that Christians have and live in newness of life.

Definitive sanctification refers to the once and for all defeat of the power of sin and the simultaneous renovation of the sinner that occurs at the inception of the Christian life. The Bible emphasizes that Christ and His redemptive work are the ultimate source of a believer's sanctification. The ethical imperatives in the epistles arise out of and are rooted in the gracious indicatives of the gospel. Salvation includes both our regeneration and sanctification. "They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection" (*Confession of Faith*, 25:1; see *Shorter Catechism* #35). That believers are sanctified "through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection" is taught throughout Scripture (read Jn. 17:17; 1 Cor. 1:30-31; 6:11; Eph. 2:1-7; 5:25-27; Tit. 2:13-14; Heb. 13:12, etc.). The "graces" of regeneration and sanctification are not ultimately the product of the human will; neither are they arbitrarily bestowed by the Father. They are the inevitable result of union with Christ.

For Paul, the decisive events which determine the Christian life all occurred in the past in redemptive history. There is a covenantal and vital union between Christ and His people which determines the elect's death to sin and life of holiness. Christ's redemptive work not only removes the guilt and penalty of sin but also merits and guarantees the application of Christ's work to His people. Thus our Lord is the "author," "captain," or "pioneer" of salvation in the most comprehensive sense of the term (cf. Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Ferguson writes, "Jesus is the 'author' of our sanctification, in the sense that he creates it for us, but he is also its 'pioneer' because he does so out of his own incarnate life, death and resurrection. He is the 'pioneer' of our salvation, because . . . he has endured the cross, despising its shame and the opposition of sinners, and is now seated at God's right hand. He is the first and only fully sanctified person. He has climbed God's holy hill with clean hands and a pure heart (Ps. 24:3-6). It is as the 'Lead Climber' that he gives the sanctification he has won to others (Acts 5:31)."<sup>22</sup> Jesus is "the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15), "[a]nd He is the Lord of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18).

Why is it necessary to bring up the topics of union with Christ as it relates to definitive sanctification and the believer's ability to be progressively sanctified over time and persevere? It is necessary because the Auburn "theologians" repeatedly speak of people who are truly united to Christ but who are not definitively sanctified, who do not persevere in holiness. The Bible teaches that those united to Christ are redeemed in the fullest sense of the term. Murray writes, "Union with Christ is a very inclusive subject. It embraces the wide span of salvation from its ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect. It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption

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<sup>22</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, "The Reformed View" in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1988), 49.

both in its accomplishment and in its application. Union with Christ binds all together and insures that to all for whom Christ has purchased redemption he effectively applies and communicates the same”<sup>23</sup> The Bible does not teach two forms of union with Christ, one for the elect and one for the non-elect. The Auburn “theologians” must either redefine union with Christ in an unbiblical manner; or argue that the merits of Christ’s death and resurrection do not have the power to save; or they must place the ultimate deciding factor in the salvation of sinners in man, not God (which is the Romanist-Arminian position); or they must abandon their own position as unscriptural and illogical.

## The Auburn Theology and Baptismal Regeneration

One of the main reasons that the Auburn theology must hold that the blood of Christ only *temporarily* saves most “Christians,” that Jesus’ atonement is simultaneously efficacious and non-efficacious for most professing believers, is their bizarre understanding of baptism. Note the following quotes:

How could you know you are in Him? God gave you the seal and sign of baptism. He gave you that rite that brought you into Christ and you can look and you can trust that God’s promises are objective.<sup>24</sup>

The Bible doesn’t know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant and really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks about reality, the efficacy of baptism.<sup>25</sup>

Raise your right hand if you knew that the Westminster Confession taught baptismal regeneration. . . . Baptism means that the one baptized has a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, the one baptized has been grafted into Christ, he has the sign and seal of regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and the obligation to walk in newness of life.<sup>26</sup>

Traditionally, the Reformed have said, we have to view our children as presumptively elect or presumptively regenerate, and therefore, Christian, if we are willing to take the Scriptures as face value, there is no presumption necessary. Just take the Bible. And this is true, of course, because by the baptism, by baptism the Spirit joins us to Christ since he is the elect one and the Church is the elect people, we are joined to his body. We therefore are elect. Since

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<sup>23</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 165.

<sup>24</sup>John Barach, *Covenant and Election*, tape 6. Note what Doug Wilson says regarding John Barach’s lecture: “Theologically I think I want to amen everything that John said in his talk about election and covenant and the reality of it, how that works” (Doug Wilson, *The Curses of the New Covenant*, tape 7). Barach rejects the distinction between the visible and invisible church to the extent that he asserts that Ephesians 1 (the classic passage regarding God’s predestination of the elect) applies specifically to what orthodox theologians identify as the visible church. Note how Barach speaks of the visible church as though non-elect tares simply don’t exist. “What does it mean, though, to be a church member? What does it mean to be one of God’s covenant people? It means that you have been brought into relationship with God, you are in fellowship with the triune God, brought into his family life to share with him in his love. God has brought you into the people on whom he has set his love, and therefore you personally are the object of God’s love. You are among the people he has saved, the people he has exodused and the people he has committed to saving” (*Covenant and Election*, tape 6). Note Wilson’s absurd comments: “I want to begin by saying that when we first start talking about the objectivity of the covenant and it starts to sink in what we are saying. You mean that you are saying that lesbian Eskimo bishop lady is a Christian? She is not a Buddhist, she is not a Muslim, yes, in the New Testament sense, she is a New Testament Christian” (Doug Wilson, *The Curses of the New Covenant*, tape 7).

<sup>25</sup>John Barach, *Covenant History*, tape 3.

<sup>26</sup>Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), 103.

he is the justified one, we are justified in him. Since he is the beloved one, we are beloved in him.<sup>27</sup>

The Bible teaches us that baptism unites us [Wilkins believes that baptism is efficacious to everyone baptized] to Christ and by his, and to his body the power of the Spirit. By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we've all been made to drink of one Spirit. Paul says that at baptism you are clothed with Christ Jesus. For as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union. The clothes make the man. With our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings. Union with Christ is union with the church, his body.<sup>28</sup>

. . . [S]ome persons, not destined for final salvation, will be drawn to Christ and His people only for a time. These, for a season, enjoy real blessings, *purchased for them by Christ's cross and applied to them by the Holy Spirit* through Word and Sacrament. . . . Saul received the *same* initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other men who persevered in faith received, but he did not receive the gift of perseverance. . . . In one sense, all those in the covenant are "saved." They have been delivered out of the world and brought into the glorious *new creation of Christ*, but not all will persevere in that "salvation."<sup>29</sup>

Although the Auburn "theologians" assert in their lectures that they reject the Roman Catholic view of baptism, that the water of baptism works automatically (i.e., *ex opere operato*), nevertheless they adhere to some form of baptismal regeneration. Their view of baptism, coupled with their rejection of the distinction between the visible and invisible church, forces them to adopt positions regarding regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness and the love of Christ that have much more in common with Arminianism than historic Reformed teaching. The Arminian system, however, while unscriptural, is much more logical and coherent than the Auburn paradigm. The Auburn theology weds together doctrines and ideas that are completely incompatible and contradictory.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Steve Wilkins, *Half Way Covenant*, tape 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* In the same lecture Steve Wilkins refers to the modern Presbyterian view of infant baptism as "nothing more than a wet infant dedication service." He also accuses the great southern Presbyterian theologians Thornwell and Dabney of holding the same view. Given the fact that Wilkins holds to a Lutheran, high-church Episcopalian view of baptism (i.e., baptismal regeneration), his criticisms should be taken with a large grain of salt.

<sup>29</sup> *Summary Statement of the Auburn Ave. Presbyterian Church's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation*, emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> Sometimes they attempt to eliminate serious problems in their system by redefining or recasting certain doctrines. Note for example Doug Wilson's rejection of the invisible-visible church distinction in history in favor of the concepts: the *historic* and *eschatological* church. Once one adopts the position that everyone baptized is regenerated and truly united to Christ, then obviously the invisible-visible distinction in history must be set aside. Wilson still needs to explain (given his definition of baptism and the covenant) why the historic church and eschatological church are not identical. According to the Auburn system the answer is that some who are baptized, united to Christ, and receive "the full blessings of salvation," do not persevere. This answer raises the question: "Why don't they persevere?" The Reformed answer is that they were not elect and therefore Christ did not die for them and the Holy Spirit did not apply Jesus' saving work unto them. The Auburn paradigm asserts that these people were regenerate, "saved" and really forgiven by Jesus' blood but because they did not persevere in faithfulness to the covenant they were cut off. The Auburn paradigm has two separate categories of salvation. There are people who are halfway saved (the temporarily regenerate) and then those who are the eschatological elect who are saved totally. Although the Auburn "theologians" loudly proclaim their loyalty to the Protestant doctrine of justification and the Reformed doctrines of grace, their system logically places the *ground* of salvation in both the work of Christ *and* continued faithfulness to the covenant. The only logical manner by which they can avoid this accusation is to go back to the Calvinistic position that people who do not persevere were never really saved in the first place. Keep in mind that while the Bible does teach that people who do not persevere will go to hell; it also explicitly teaches that such people

The Auburn speakers, as we have seen in the above quotes, teach that baptism is always efficacious and insist that the Westminster Standards also teach baptismal regeneration. For example Wilson writes, “Raise your right hand if you know that the Westminster Confession taught baptismal regeneration. . . .”<sup>31</sup> Baptismal regeneration is one of the pillars of the whole Auburn system. The Auburn assertions raise an important question. Do the Westminster Standards teach baptismal regeneration? Have all Reformed theologians misunderstood the Standards for 350 years? No, not at all! The Auburn speakers completely misrepresent the teaching of the Confession and are teaching an unbiblical view of baptism. When the Confession of Faith discusses baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace and all the benefits of the covenant, it is not teaching baptismal regeneration or the idea that baptism is always efficacious.

Further, the Confession explicitly teaches that the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment it is administered. Mr. Wilson is taking WCF 28:1 out of context. For, in a subsequent section, the Confession says that “grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, *that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated* (28:5, emphasis added). The Confession cites Acts 8:13, 23 which refer to Simon Magus who was lawfully baptized yet who remained “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (Acts 8:23). Earlier in verse 21 Peter tells Simon Magnus in explicit language that he is not saved. The Confession also says, “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, *to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto*, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time” (28:6, emphasis added). Baptism is only efficacious for those to whom grace belongs, according to God’s counsel or decree. What this means is that the benefits of the covenant of grace are *only* efficaciously conferred by the Holy Spirit *to the elect*.

The Westminster Standards (which are the pinnacle of Reformed Confessional theology) emphatically reject the Auburn doctrine that baptism is always efficacious and that everyone baptized is truly united to Christ and receives all the benefits of redemption. The Auburn doctrines have more in common with Romanism, Lutheranism and Anglicanism than historic, confessional Reformed thought. Theirs is a dangerous doctrine that has no warrant from Scripture or precedent in Reformed theology.

The absurdity of the Auburn theology is demonstrated by what baptism signifies and seals. Note the following. (1) Baptism, like circumcision, is “a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:11). (2) Baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezek. 36:35). “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). “He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). (3) Baptism is a sign and seal of the remission of sins (Mk. 1:4; Ac. 2:38). (4) It also symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:26, 33; Ac. 1:5; 2:2, 17; 11:15-16) and spiritual purification (Ezek. 36:25; Jn. 3:6) that leads to a true inner and progressive sanctification (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; Mt. 7:18). (5) Baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ and all the saving benefits that flow from that union (Col. 2:11-14)—

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were never saved and loved by Jesus in the first place (see the sections above that discuss 1 Jn. 2:19-20; Mt. 7:24-25 as well as Heb. 6:4ff. below).

<sup>31</sup>Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough*, 103.

regeneration, forgiveness of sins, sanctification (Rom. 6:4-18), physical resurrection, and glorification (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 26, 42-55).

Given the Reformed teaching regarding what baptism signifies and seals, if baptism were truly efficacious in all cases, then everyone baptized would without question go to heaven. If people who are baptized are sealed by the Holy Spirit and receive all the benefits of redemption, then of necessity they are guaranteed an eternal inheritance. They *cannot* lose their salvation. Paul writes, “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:13-14). In Ephesians 4:30 the apostle says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Gordon Clark writes, “He seals us ‘to the day of redemption.’ *Until* or *for* the day of redemption. Here we have the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This or that man in the pew may or may not have been sealed; but, if he has been, he will not be finally lost. Regeneration is a once-for-all act. We are not saved at breakfast, lost at noon, and born again in the evening. The redemption of the body from the grave, and redemption from sin will always affect us in our present life.”<sup>32</sup>

The Auburn doctrine of baptism once again places their teaching in an irresolvable dilemma. Logically, their position leaves them with three possible alternatives, each of which is unscriptural. (1) That everyone baptized will certainly go to heaven. (2) That the recipients do not really receive all the things signified by baptism. This view divides the work of Christ into pieces like Arminianism, contradicts the biblical doctrine of baptism, and contradicts their own statements that those baptized receive everything signified but they can lose their salvation if they do not persevere with true saving faith and the works of faith. This position explicitly denies the true meaning and efficacy of baptism because the Bible teaches that those who truly receive the merits of Christ’s death, who are sealed by the Holy Spirit, cannot apostatize and go to hell. The Auburn “theologians” are in the precarious position of having either to deny the meaning of baptism and the doctrine of perseverance (which contrary to Mr. Wilson’s comments is clearly taught in Scripture and easy to prove), or hold together teachings which are blatantly contradictory. (3) Further, if salvation is truly lost, they must either hold to the position that people are saved for a time *without saving faith* which is a gift of God merited by Christ, or they must hold to an Arminian view of faith which is self-generated and liable to fail at any moment. The first position explicitly denies the biblical doctrine of salvation<sup>33</sup>, while the second makes

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<sup>32</sup>Gordon Clark, *Ephesians* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985), 162.

<sup>33</sup>Steve Schlissel says, “The keeping of the commands of God identified as putting trust in God is contrasted with forgetting God and disobeying God. To be in the gospel is to be in the law, the law of God. The question has always been what does the Lord require? We have changed the question since Luther’s day. Perhaps imperceptible to some, but quite drastically if you look at it. The question is commonly, what must I do to be saved? But that’s the wrong question! The question is what does the Lord require? If we don’t retool our churches, to turn around from the ‘What must I do to be saved?’ to ‘What does the Lord require?’ we are going to die. Because in answering one, what must I do to be saved, you move in the idea of sola, sola, sola, and then you have the sola fide and if you are only saved by faith apart from any activity or any response to God’s word and then what kind of faith is that?” (*Covenant Hearing*, Tape 1).

According to Schlissel we should never ask the question “What must I do to be saved?” Such a question does not fit into Schlissel’s view of salvation which is a combination of faith and law keeping. Was *sola fide* a great mistake on the part of Luther, Calvin, Knox and the whole Protestant Reformation? No, not at all! After Paul and Silas were miraculously set free from prison by God the Philippian jailer asked: “What must I do to be saved?” According to Schlissel we would expect Paul to rebuke the jailer for asking the wrong question. Apparently Paul should have said: “Get baptized, enter the covenant and keep living in obedience to the law and then you (if you persevere) will be saved.” Paul instead answers in the fashion of Luther or Calvin. He says “Believe on the Lord

faith a work or partial ground of salvation and thus also is a denial of salvation by grace alone.<sup>34</sup>

Regarding the efficacy of baptism, the Reformed position has always been that it is made efficacious by the Holy Spirit and that only true believers (the elect) receive the full benefits of baptism. Elect infants who are regenerated at baptism will obviously never know a time when they did not believe in and love Jesus. Sometimes the infants of believers are regenerated at a later time. No person, however (except the extraordinary case of elect infants who die in infancy), can receive the full benefits of the covenant apart from saving faith. Sadly, sometimes the children of believers who are baptized are never regenerated and never receive the gift of saving faith. Such persons were members of the visible church with certain rights and privileges. However, their baptism was never made efficacious. Their baptism will only bring upon them greater condemnation. Paul says that circumcision, to the unbelieving Jew, was uncircumcision (Rom. 2:25). Our Lord says that the circumcised Jews of His day were the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 3:9). Jesus told the circumcised Pharisees that their covenantal father was the devil (Jn. 8:44). “[F]or the efficacy of a sacrament faith is required, devotion and an internal motion of the mind, both because the Scriptures expressly assert it (Mk. 16:16; 1 Cor. 11:27; Ac. 2:38) and because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), and because the promise (which is continued in the sacrament) and faith are correlated. . . .”<sup>35</sup> Hodge’s comparison of baptism and the word as means of grace is very helpful. He writes,

Baptism, however, is not only a sign and seal; it is also a means of grace, because in it the blessings which it signifies are conveyed, and the promises of which it is the seal, are assured or fulfilled to those who are baptized, provided they believe. The Word of God is declared to be the wisdom and power of God to salvation; it is the means used by the Holy Spirit in conferring on men the benefits of redemption. Of course all who merely hear or read

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Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Ac. 16:31; cf. 2:21; 4:12; 11:12). Paul taught that the moment a person believes in Jesus he or she is saved, that is, justified by faith (*sola fide*) apart from the works of the law (see Rom. 3:20-22, 27-28). Is the Reformed doctrine of *sola fide* anti-law (or antinomian) as Schlissel implies? Did the Reformers teach that people are saved by a faith that stands alone as Schlissel implies? No. Schlissel either completely misunderstands the reformed teaching or purposely sets up a straw man. The Reformation doctrine is that a person is saved by faith alone apart from the works of the law. But once a person is saved (i.e., justified) he is sanctified or progressively made holy by the Holy Spirit as a result of his union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-18). The keeping of the law is done out of gratitude for our salvation and does not contribute one iota to it. Schlissel apparently defines antinomianism as a refusal to make law-keeping an instrument of justification along with faith. Apparently Schlissel and his comrades have failed to distinguish between salvation in the narrow sense (justification) and salvation in the broad sense (justification, sanctification, and sometimes even glorification). When Paul tells believers to work out their *salvation* with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) he is definitely referring to sanctification, for he completes the verse by saying “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (v. 13). Anyone who confounds justification and sanctification, as Schlissel does, has placed himself squarely in the Romanist camp on this matter. Beware of the leaven of Norman Shepherd. His doctrine of salvation is theological poison.

<sup>34</sup>Having read the lectures from the Auburn Avenue conference, the type of answer we would expect to receive after pointing out the illogical absurdities of their system is: “Well, you are obviously influenced by Greek and Enlightenment thinking. What you need to do is return to a Hebraistic mindset.” The problem with such a response is that their system is not really rooted in a Hebrew worldview. It rather has much more in common with the Barthian concept of dialectical tension and paradox. This present author is not aware of any place in the Old Testament in which we are encouraged to adhere to two contradictory, self-refuting ideas at the same time. It is very arrogant for such young and inexperienced theologians to assert that they have discovered something new and improved; that all the Reformed divines and theologians of the last four hundred years were grossly mistaken in their concepts of the church, the covenant, baptism, justification, and perseverance.

<sup>35</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 3:365.

the Word of God are not saved; neither do all who receive the baptism of water experience the baptism of the Holy Ghost; but this is not inconsistent with the Word's being the means of salvation, or with baptism's being the washing of regeneration. Our Lord says we are sanctified by the truth. Paul says we put on Christ in baptism (Gal. iii. 27). When a man receives the Gospel with a true faith, he receives the blessings which the Gospel promises; when he receives baptism in the exercise of faith, he receives the benefits of which baptism is the sign and seal. Unless the recipient of this sacrament be insincere, baptism is an act of faith, it is an act which and by which he receives and appropriates the offered benefits of the redemption of Christ. And, therefore, to baptism may be properly attributed all that in the Scriptures is attributed to faith. Baptism washes away sin (Acts xxii. 16); it unites to Christ and makes us the sons of God (Gal. iii. 26, 27); we are therein buried with Christ (Rom. vi. 3); it is (according to one interpretation of Titus iii. 5) the washing of regeneration. But all this is said on the assumption that it is what it purports to be, an act of faith.<sup>36</sup>

The only argument to which the Auburn "theologians" can appeal to circumvent the standard Reformed position on the efficacy of baptism and faith is to assert that what Reformed theologians have always referred to as a temporary, non-genuine, non-saving faith is actually a real saving faith that can be lost. Such a view, however, is exegetically and theologically impossible because true saving faith is a gift that is founded on the merits of Christ. As such it cannot be temporary. To assert that it involves separating the foundation of salvation (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) from its application by the Holy Spirit.<sup>37</sup> That separation is precisely what Arminians do.

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<sup>36</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:589.

<sup>37</sup>Although the Auburn lectures are almost completely devoid of biblical exegesis, a passage that is used to support their understanding of baptism is 1 Peter 3:21. It reads, "There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...." What is particularly interesting about this passage is that it is an excellent proof text *against* baptismal regeneration and the Auburn view of baptism. Verse 21 comes immediately after a discussion of Noah and his family who were saved through water. Peter says that baptism is an antitype or counterpart to Noah's deliverance through water. The apostle then inserts a parenthetical statement to make sure that his comment about baptism saving us is not misconstrued. To paraphrase, he says, "Look I don't want you to get the impression that being sprinkled with water saves you because physical water can only remove dirt from you skin. What I am really talking about is baptism in the Spirit and regeneration which takes place within man and that leads to a clean conscience before God. Spirit baptism is rooted in your union with Christ in His resurrection." The absurdity of the baptismal regeneration view is further demonstrated by the obvious fact that the antitype to physical water is not physical water but that which the water represents—the spiritual cleansing and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Jay Adams writes, "Spirit **baptism** puts a person 'into Christ' (1 Cor. 12:12). The argument in Romans 6 helps clarify Peter's use (1 Peter seems in many ways to parallel Romans). Paul says there that we were 'baptized into Christ Jesus' (vs. 3). That is, we were 'baptized into every aspect of His life.' He argues if we have the whole, then we have the parts; if we are in *Christ*, then we are in His circumcision, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and seating at God's right hand. His point in Romans 6 is that we must live a new life. If we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into His death and resurrection to a new life. In Colossians 2:11, 12, Paul can also say that we have been circumcised with Christ by virtue of our Spirit baptism into Him. And, in Ephesians 2:6 (see also Col. 3:1), He considers us in the heavens seated at God's right hand in Him" (*Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter* [Greenville, SC: A Press, 1978], 116). If (as the Auburn view apparently asserts) the ritual of baptism itself actually brings one into a true union with Christ then every single person who was ever lawfully baptized would go to heaven because (as Dr. Adams just noted) union with Christ gives the believing sinner salvation in the fullest sense possible.

## The Auburn Paradigm's Rejection of Historic Calvinism

The Auburn theology with its rejection of the two-fold distinction of the church; baptismal regeneration; unique understanding of the covenant idea that people who were truly saved and forgiven can fall away; is primarily based on two types of passages. There are passages which supposedly teach that genuine Christians can fall away and go to hell and there are those which are said to teach that people who apostatize were at one time truly united to Christ. Given the foundational nature of these sorts of passages for the Auburn system we will examine some of their primary proof texts in order to prove that their interpretation of these passages is illegitimate and contrary to the analogy of Scripture.

The first group of passages that need to be explained are those which warn professing Christians of the danger of falling away. Are there not many warnings in Scripture against apostasy and unbelief? Further, are there not many examples of "believers" who apostatized (e.g., King Saul, Judas Iscariot, Hymenaeus Alexander, Philetus and Demas)? It cannot be denied that the Bible contains many admonitions to persevere and warnings against apostasy (e.g., Jn. 8:31; 15:6, 7:10; Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 2:1-3; 3:14). The Bible talks about: the need to continue in God's goodness (Rom. 11:21-22) and endure (2 Tim. 2:12); those who endure for only a while (Mt. 13:21); some who depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1) and have strayed concerning the truth (1 Tim. 2:17). Some of the strongest warnings against apostasy are found in the book of Hebrews (3:16; 4:6; 6:4-6; 10:26-30). Peter speaks of apostates who had escaped the pollution of the world for a season (1 Pet. 2:20-22). The author of Hebrews says that apostates had once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, and even were partakers of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4ff.). The Auburn "theologians," like Arminians, quote from among these and say that we have to take these passages at face value. When we do, they assert, it is obvious that believers can, have and do fall from salvation. Wilson even likens the traditional Reformed view to a giant "beware of cliff" sign in the middle of Kansas.<sup>38</sup>

Another group of passages that need to be considered is those which speak of the union of God's people with Christ. There is the discourse of the vine and vinedressers in John 15:1-8ff., as well as the illustration of the olive tree in Romans 11:17-25. These passages (we are told) can only be interpreted as teaching that people who did not persevere and thus were cut off by God were really united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and forgiven. Steve Wilkins writes, "Calvinists have not dealt faithfully with this text. . . . The distinction of 'external' and 'internal' union are invented and not in the text. Both kinds of branches are truly and vitally joined on the vine. Both can and should be fruitful."<sup>39</sup>

A number of important issues must be considered as we examine the Auburnites' unique understanding of union with Christ and the ability of true believers to apostatize.

(1) There is the issue of biblical hermeneutics. The Auburn paradigm violates standard Protestant principles of interpretation. One of these principles is that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. The Bible cannot teach that real believers can never totally fall away and also teach that real genuine Christians can apostatize. When we assert that the Auburn system on this point is contradictory, it needs to be pointed out that the Auburn speakers have attempted to harmonize their system with Calvinism. On the one hand, they repeatedly assert in their lectures that real Christians who are forgiven can and do apostatize. Yet on the other hand, those Christians who

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<sup>38</sup>Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough*, 132. Actually, there are dangerous cliffs in Kansas (e.g., Castle Rock).

<sup>39</sup>*The Covenant and Apostasy*, tape 1.

happen to be elect are given the extra gift of perseverance and thus cannot fall away and go to hell. Note the radical difference between the Auburn theology and classic Calvinism. The orthodox Calvinist would say that people who fall away were never truly saved (i.e., forgiven by Christ's blood) and baptized in the Holy Spirit. The orthodox Calvinist says this because: a) he uses the clearer portions of Scripture to interpret the less clear (this point is considered below); and, b) he wants to maintain the integrity of the doctrine of the atonement. The Bible teaches repeatedly and clearly that the efficacy of our Lord's work cannot be separated from its application. The Auburn "theologians" have invented a new category of Christian who is truly redeemed but only for a season. This saved, loved, forgiven believer is not elect and thus does not receive the gift of perseverance. As we noted earlier in our discussion of the atonement, the idea that Jesus loves the non-elect, washes away their sins by His blood and gives them the Holy Spirit, is blatantly unscriptural and illogical.

Another principle of interpretation that the Auburn "theologians" violate is that the clearer portions of Scripture are to be used to interpret the less clear. What is a believer supposed to do when there are dozens of passages that teach that Christians cannot apostatize, yet there are many warnings against falling away and examples of professing Christians who have apostatized in Scripture? The orthodox Calvinist does two things. First, he looks to clearer portions of Scripture that are related to the topic in question in order to harmonize what many consider to be an *apparent* contradiction in the Bible. There are several passages in Scripture which indicate that people that fall away were never really saved (i.e., justified, cleansed by Jesus' blood) to begin with. Since we have already dealt with many of these passages we will keep our comments brief. In Matthew 7:23 we learn that on the day of judgment Jesus tells hypocritical false professors of Christianity, "I never knew you." That is, "I never had a saving, loving relationship, or interest in you whatsoever." In 1 John 2:19-20 the apostle says plainly that people who apostatize were never "of us." They were never genuine believers. They never really belonged to Christ or the invisible church. When the author of Hebrews discussed the issue of apostasy he made it abundantly clear that apostasy is a manifestation of *unbelief* (Heb. 3:19). The Jews who were disobedient in the wilderness and thus could not enter the promised land (Heb. 4:6) never were united to Christ by faith or justified. Further, there are many passages which indicate that apostates were never regenerated or born again (Ac. 7:51; 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27; 4:13).

Secondly, the orthodox Calvinist examines his interpretation in the light of theology or the overall teaching of the Bible as a whole (the analogy of Scripture). Obviously, if an interpretation contradicts several well-established doctrines, such as election, the atonement, regeneration, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, then it needs to be rejected.

The Auburn paradigm (primarily because of an unbiblical view of John 15 and Romans 11) completely ignores the Bible's own explanation of why apostasy takes place. Apostasy is the manifestation of unbelief. It demonstrates that some people in the visible church were *never* regenerated, united to Christ, baptized in the Spirit, justified or *internally* sanctified. Further, the Auburn system violates several important doctrines, especially the doctrine of atonement. While it is true that physical separation and temporary deliverance are sometimes equated in Scripture with being bought or saved,<sup>40</sup> it is *never* the case that Jesus' blood removes a person's sins who

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<sup>40</sup>The most common proof text for such a view is 2 Peter 2:1, "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction." The Auburn paradigm (or Arminian view of such passages) should be rejected for a number of reasons. First, one needs to understand that Peter is *not* speaking

is going to go to hell. It is *never* the case that our Lord's sinless life is imputed to an apostate child of the devil.

(2) The Auburn paradigm is founded upon unbiblical presuppositions and sloppy exegesis. Numerous mistaken ideas reoccur in the conference lectures.

For example, there does not appear to be any recognition of a difference between genuine and false faith. For example, Wilkins appeals to passages which speak of those who "believe for a while" (Lk. 8:13) as evidence for his unique view of the covenant. The Auburn theology fails to recognize that Scripture itself sometimes speaks of belief in a non-saving sense (i.e., as a false or spurious faith). An obvious example is John 2:23-24: "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." Hutchinson writes, "It is most

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about Christ in this passage, but God the Father. The word that Peter used for Lord (*despoten*) in this passage, when used of a person in the Godhead, is always used to describe God the Father, and is never used to describe Christ. For example, Jude 4 says, "The only Lord (*despoten*) God and our Lord (*kurion*) Jesus Christ." Other instances are Luke 2:29, Acts 4:24, 2 Timothy 2:21, and Revelation 6:10. The Holy Spirit for some reason uses a different word to describe the Father's lordship from that of Jesus Christ. This, of course, is not meant to detract in any way from Christ's glory and power. Gill writes, "The word *despotes* is properly expressive only of that power which masters have over their servants; whereas the word *kurios*, which is used whenever Christ is called Lord, signifies that dominion and authority which princes have over their subjects" (John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1978 (1735)], 61).

The reason that it is significant that Peter is speaking about the Father rather than specifically about Christ is that the word "bought," in this context, cannot refer to the blood of Christ. This makes sense in light of the fact that the Bible teaches that those redeemed by Christ cannot fall away and be forever lost (e.g., Jn. 10:29; Rom. 8:29-39; Eph. 1:11, 14). What this purchase refers to is a *temporal* deliverance. Peter is using an expression which harkens back to Israel's deliverance from Egypt. "Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?" (Dt. 32:6). There can be no question that Peter had Israel's deliverance and experience in the wilderness in mind (cf. 2 Pet. 2:12-13; Dt. 32:5). Note the comparison between the people's corruption and their blemish. Gill writes, "Peter makes use of this phrase much in the same manner as Moses had done before him, to aggravate the ingratitude and impiety of these false teachers among the Jews; that they should deny, if not in words, at least in works, that mighty Jehovah, who had of old redeemed their fathers out of Egypt, with a stretched-out arm, and, in successive ages, had distinguished them with particular favours; being ungodly men, turning the grace, the doctrine of the grace of God into lasciviousness" (Ibid).

The history of Israel shows that many of the Israelites denied the Lord that bought them, and thus perished in the wilderness. But we know from subsequent revelation that the Israelites who perished in the wilderness were never truly saved in the spiritual sense, but only received a temporary physical deliverance. When the author of Hebrews describes the Israelites who perished in the wilderness he says, "They have not known My ways.... We see that they could not enter in because of *unbelief*" (Heb. 3:10, 19). Therefore, there is no reason (in 2 Pet. 2:1) to conclude that Peter refers to people who had genuine saving faith in Christ and who were actually purchased with His blood. In fact, there is every reason to conclude that Peter is discussing those who never had true faith; who only received temporary outward benefits. As the apostle John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 Jn. 2:19).

Another strong reason to reject the interpretation which says that Christ shed His blood for people who go to hell is that it would totally contradict Scripture. Scripture consistently affirms that Christ died for: "His people" (Mt. 1:21); His "sheep" (Jn. 10:11, 14-16); "the church" (Eph. 5:25); "the elect" (Rom. 8:31-33); "us"—that is, believers (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24; Heb. 1:3; 9:12; 10:14; 1 Jn. 1:7; 4:9-10); "the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16); the "many" (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 10:45; Heb. 9:28). The Bible emphatically declares that all those for whom Christ died will definitely be saved (Jn. 6:39; Mt. 1:21; 18:11; Lk. 19:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-5). Furthermore, it is irrational to assert that Christ removed the guilt and penalty due for sin for a particular person who will also have to pay the penalty for his own sins in hell. That would be a great injustice.

unusual for some natural men to be so far affected with Christ and his working as to be convinced in their judgment of some excellency in him, and be drawn to profess some sort of embracing of him, and yet they remain still in nature and unconverted; for ‘many believed in his name,’ or professed to do so, who yet were unsound, as the sequel cleareth.”<sup>41</sup>

As another example, there is little or no recognition of the distinction between common-external operations of the Holy Spirit and indwelling saving workings (e.g., see point number 10 in the AAPC’s position statement on the covenant, etc.). This lack of recognition of the distinction between the Spirit’s work in the elect and upon the non-elect not only contradicts Scripture, but cannot be harmonized with historic Reformed theology. For instance, in the book of Acts, Stephen rebukes the circumcised Jews of his day, saying: “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you” (Ac. 7:51). Stephen tells circumcised Jews who were in the covenant: “You are unregenerate and thus you reject the truth and resist the Holy Spirit.” Yes, but doesn’t it say they “resist the Holy Spirit”? Indeed, it does. But, how does Stephen define their resistance to the Holy Spirit’s work? He says they persecuted the prophets and murdered the Messiah (Ac. 7:52). Then he points out they received the law but they didn’t keep it (Ac. 7:53). They did not believe in or obey the divinely inspired Scriptures. That is, they resisted the outward call of the gospel. They resisted an external work of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who refuses to repent and believe resists the Spirit. The Jews were especially guilty and worthy of judgment because they promised God that they would adhere to the terms of the Sinai covenant (Ex. 19:8).

We ask the Auburn “theologians”: If the Spirit’s work is the same in the elect and non-elect, then how can you define regeneration and effectual calling in a manner that does not contradict Reformed theology? Regeneration and effectual calling are works of the Spirit that man cannot overpower or render null and void. The Auburn paradigm must either define these theological terms in an Arminian fashion or it must admit that the Holy Spirit does not work upon the elect and the non-elect in the same way. The classic Reformed view is expressed in an excellent manner by James Bannerman. He writes, “The members of the Church invisible are joined in an inward relationship to Christ, in consequence of having listened to His inward call by the Spirit, and being vitally united to Him through faith. The members of the Church visible are joined in an outward connection with Christ, in consequence of having obeyed His outward call by the Word, and being now made partakers by Him in the external privileges and ordinance of a church state.”<sup>42</sup> Bannerman’s statement says nothing new, and probably will not tickle any of the ears of those who seek to be profound and innovative. It does however have the advantage of being biblical and logical.

As a third example, there is the acceptance of the Arminian idea that commands or admonitions presuppose ability. Doug Wilson writes, “But the Reformed have their own set of problems here. One such problem is to assume that all such warnings are hypothetical. In other words, God warns His elect away from something that cannot happen to them—something like erecting a giant ‘BEWARE OF THE CLIFF’ sign in the middle of Kansas. The fundamental problem with treating passages as hypothetical is that the *reality* of the warning is often assumed in the warning. Demas really did fall away. Unbelieving Jews were really cut out of the olive tree and the Gentiles were warned that the same thing could happen to them. Judas fell away. These are

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<sup>41</sup>George Hutcheson, *John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1841, 1657]), 39.

<sup>42</sup>James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Faith, 1960 [1869]), 1:31.

not hypothetical warnings.”<sup>43</sup> If Wilson is speaking of corporate election or the visible church then obviously such warnings are not hypothetical. Professing Christians do fall away, apostatize and go to hell. If Wilson is talking about individual election (which is likely, given the fact that he is critiquing the Reformed position) then we ask Mr. Wilson how is it possible for a member of the elect to fall away? Wilson apparently believes that the warnings against apostasy presuppose that the elect (individually) can apostatize.

Although Wilson’s view appears logical and is common among evangelical Arminians, it is neither necessary nor scriptural. The fact that Christians are frequently warned against apostasy does not necessarily mean that the elect can really fall away. Frequently in Scripture God commands people to do things which they cannot possibly do. Jesus commanded His disciples to be perfect (Mt. 5:48), yet the apostle John says that no Christian can achieve perfection in this life (1 Jn. 1:8). Our Lord often commanded people to do things that apart from God’s miraculous power they were totally unable to accomplish. For example, He told the man with the withered hand to “stretch out your hand” (Mk. 3:5). Lazarus who was a dead rotting corpse was commanded to “come forth” (Jn. 11:43). People who are dead in trespasses and sins and totally unable to respond to the gospel are repeatedly ordered to repent and believe. The fact that they are unable does not alter their obligation one iota. The fact that the elect cannot fall away and apostatize does not lessen the importance or obligation of God’s commands to persevere. Remember, in the process of progressive sanctification, God works through means or secondary causes. The warnings and threats found in the New Testament are used by the Holy Spirit to motivate us unto greater diligence, watchfulness, effort, and faithfulness toward God.

The Auburn paradigm assumes (in a manner virtually identical to Arminianism) that if genuine believers cannot fall away, then they will not take the warnings against apostasy seriously. This assumption must be rejected for at least two reasons. First, all admonitions and commands of God are to be heeded regardless of ability or disability. Second, God works through secondary means to bring about progressive sanctification. The elect persevere precisely because they don’t take their walk with Christ or holiness for granted. The real believer rests upon God’s precious promises regarding his own preservation; yet at the same time is never passive but strives after holiness as if his perseverance depended upon it. Murray’s comments are very helpful. He writes,

[I]t is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is *always* *respective* of the life of holiness and fidelity. And so it is never proper to think of a believer irrespective of the fruits of faith and holiness. To say that a believer is secure whatever may be the extent of his addiction to sin in his subsequent life is to abstract faith in Christ from its very definition and it ministers to that abuse which turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. The doctrine of perseverance is the doctrine that believers *persevere*; it cannot be too strongly stressed that it is the *perseverance* of the saints. And that means that the saints, those united to Christ by the effectual call of the Father and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will persevere until the end. If they persevere, they endure, they continue. It is not at all that they will be saved irrespective of their perseverance or their continuance, but that they will assuredly persevere. Consequently, the security that is theirs is inseparable from their perseverance. Is this not what Jesus said? “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Doug Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), 132.

<sup>44</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 155-156.

Thirdly, any professing Christian who backslides or who habitually practices sin *ought* to lose his assurance and *should* tremble before the passages which warn of apostasy. The many passages of Scripture which discuss self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 11:22; Heb. 3:12, 4:11), how to have assurance (1 Jn. 1:6-7,9; 2:19-24; 3:6-10; etc.) and the dire consequences of apostasy (Rom. 11:20 ff.; Jn. 15:6; Heb. 3:19, 4:1 ff., 6:1-11, 2 Pet. 2:1 ff.) are there precisely because Christians do backslide, because professors of Christ do apostatize. There is no need to pervert the doctrines of election, perseverance or the nature of the covenant to explain such passages. Calvinist theologians have successfully dealt with such objections for centuries.

(3) The passages which speak of apostasy do *not* teach that the elect or genuine believers can forever fall away and go to hell. A favorite passage of Wilson's and all those who want to prove the apostasy of genuine believers is Hebrews 6:4-6, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." Although this is a difficult passage, a brief consideration of it within its context will demonstrate that it does not support the Auburn paradigm. The author of the book of Hebrews was dealing with Jews who joined the Christian assembly for a time and then returned to Pharisaical Judaism. They are said to "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame" (6:6). These Jews, by going back to the Pharisaical religion, totally repudiated Jesus Christ. They joined forces with the religious leaders responsible for the frame-up, torture and execution of Christ. Note that the author of Hebrews does not refer to the apostates as "us" or even as "you" but as "those." Note also that as soon as this section dealing with the apostates ends, the writers sets up a contrast between the real and the counterfeit, "But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation" (v. 9).<sup>45</sup> "They are in the following verses compared to the ground on which the rain often falls, and beareth nothing but thorns and briars. But this is not with true believers. For faith itself is an herb peculiar to the enclosed garden of Christ, and meet for him by whom we are dressed."<sup>46</sup>

But what about the terms used to describe those who fell away? Don't they indicate a real interior gracious operation of the Spirit in the non-elect? No, they most certainly do not. When the author says that these apostates "were once enlightened" (v. 4) he simply means that they had been instructed in gospel doctrine. Similarly, Peter had said of apostates that they had a "knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 2:20). These people had an *intellectual* understanding of the gospel. They also "tasted of the heavenly gift." The word taste is used metaphorically in the sense of sampled. They gave Christianity a try. They never really

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<sup>45</sup> John Brown wrote of verse 9 and following: "The general meaning of this paragraph, all the parts of which are closely connected together plainly is: 'The reason why I have made these awful statements about apostates, is not that I consider you whom I am addressing as apostates; for your conduct proves that this is not your character, and the promise of God secures that their doom shall not be yours; but that you may be stirred up to preserving steadiness in the faith, and hope, and obedience of the truth, by a constant continuance in which alone you can, like those who have gone before you, obtain, in all their perfection, the promised blessings of the Christian salvation.' The reason why the Apostle had stated so particularly the aggravated guilt and all but hopeless condition of apostates, was not that he considered the Hebrew Christians whom he was addressing as in a state of apostasy. No, he was persuaded better of them—'things accompanying salvation'" (*Hebrews* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1862) 1983], 306).

<sup>46</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1855]), 5:85.

“consumed” Jesus by faith or internally received Him. They had a mere superficial interest in Him as does a person who experiments in the latest fashion or fad. Owen writes, “It is as if he had said, ‘I speak not of those who have received and digested the spiritual food of their souls, and turned it into spiritual nourishment; but of such as have so far tasted of it, as they ought to have desired it as “sincere milk, to have grown thereby.”’ But they had received such an experiment of its divine truth and power, as that it had various effects upon them.”<sup>47</sup> The Jewish apostates demonstrated their lack of saving interest in the Savior when they went back to Pharisaical Judaism.

The statement that is supposed to be the most perplexing for Calvinists is in verse 4 where the author of Hebrews says, “... and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit.” Doesn’t this passage indicate that people in whom the Spirit dwells can apostatize? No, it doesn’t. Aside from the fact that Scripture teaches that those regenerated, baptized in and sealed by the Spirit can never fall away or curse the Savior (Phil. 1:6; 1 Th. 5:23-24; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:3; etc.). The word translated “partakers” indicates they shared or benefited from the functioning of spiritual gifts in the church. “It is one thing for a man to have a share in and benefit by the gifts of the church, another to be personally himself endowed with them.”<sup>48</sup> Pink writes, “It should be pointed out that the Greek word for ‘partakers’ here is a different one from that used in Col. 1:12 and 2 Peter 1:4, where real Christians are in view. The word here means ‘companions,’ referring to what is external rather than internal. . . . These apostates had never been ‘born of the Spirit’ (John 3:6), still less were their bodies His ‘temples’ (1 Cor. 6:19).”<sup>49</sup>

There is no exegetical reason in Hebrews 6 (or any other passage of Scripture) for us to reject orthodox Calvinism in favor of the Auburn paradigm.

(4) The Auburn paradigm rests in large part on an unscriptural understanding of John 15:1-8: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

This portion of Scripture is appealed to many times in the Auburn lectures as proof of their new paradigm, that genuine believers who are truly and vitally united to Christ can be cut off the vine or separated from Jesus and perish in hell. We are told that this parable teaches that people who are truly saved, who are receiving sap from the trunk (i.e., who are receiving the Holy Spirit’s vivifying and sanctifying power), can forever fall away if they do not persevere in keeping the covenant. We are also told that Calvinists have been dishonest with their exegesis of this passage and have simply refused to accept the obvious import of our Lord’s words; that real Christians can apostatize and go to hell. This passage holds a special place in the Auburn system because they teach that everyone who is baptized is regenerated, united to Christ and sanctified

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<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.* 5:82.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.* 5:81.

<sup>49</sup>Arthur Pink, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981 [1954]), 291.

internally by the Holy Spirit. After we set forth the standard Calvinistic interpretation of this passage, we will explain why the Auburn view must be rejected.

The allegory of the vine and the branches is a continuation of teaching designed by our Lord to prepare the disciples for His departure. In this section of Scripture, Jesus stresses the need for mutual love (13:31 ff.) and the love between Himself, the Father and His people (14:20-24). Chapter 15 comes in between two very important discussions of the coming of the Holy Spirit (14:26; 16:7-15). Christ is leaving the disciples physically, but He is coming to help His people and live in them by sending His Holy Spirit. He will not leave them alone. He will never forsake His sheep.

The central feature of John 15:1-10 regards the importance of abiding in Christ (the word “abide” occurs ten times in verses 4-10). The importance of abiding in the Savior relates to four main areas. First, genuine Christians have a true, real, spiritual union with Jesus that they are obligated to nurture by faith, the means of grace and personal holiness. As believers we are to recognize our union with the Savior and live in terms of that union (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:1-18; 2 Cor. 12:10). “Their root is Christ, and all that there is in the root is for the benefit of the branches. Because He lives, they shall live also.”<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, the believer is completely dependent upon Jesus as a branch is dependent upon the main stem for life, nourishment and growth. All the saving graces flow from a believer’s union with Christ. In other words, “without Me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). “[A]ll life and strength proceeds from himself alone. Hence it follows, that the nature of man is unfruitful and destitute of everything good; because no man has the nature of a *vine*, till he be implanted in him. But this is given to the elect alone by special grace.”<sup>51</sup>

Thirdly, the union of believers with Christ produces good fruit. Union with the Savior results in a change in man’s heart (regeneration or initial sanctification) as well as justification and the gifts of faith and repentance. A person united to Christ has a new disposition, new desires, new motives. His works flow from faith in God’s word. They are practiced with a sincere desire to glorify God. Further, the Father is portrayed as active in the sanctification of Christians. “He prunes and purifies them in affliction and trouble, in order to make them more fruitful in holiness.”<sup>52</sup>

Fourthly, those who do not abide in Christ, who do not produce fruit, are taken away (v. 2) or cast out, thrown into the fire and burned (v. 6). The common Calvinistic view is that those who do not produce fruit and thus are burned, are people who are baptized, make a profession of faith, join the visible church and thus covenantally, in an *external manner only*, are united to Christ. Such people, however, are not vitally or spiritually united to Jesus. Ryle writes, “There are myriads of professing Christians in every Church whose union with Christ is only outward and formal. Some of them are joined to Christ by baptism and Church-membership. Some of them go even further than this, and are regular communicants and loud talkers about religion. But they all lack the one thing needful. Notwithstanding services, and sermons, and sacraments, they have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ, and Christ in them. Their union with Him is only nominal, and not real. They have ‘a name to live,’ but in the sight of God they are dead.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1976 [1873]), 3:106.

<sup>51</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 2:107.

<sup>52</sup>J. C. Ryle, 3:112.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:106-107.

This is the position that has ruffled the feathers of the Auburn speakers. They mock this interpretation as a clear case of reading one's own theological system into the text instead of allowing the text to speak for itself. In response to the Monroe four and in defense of the standard Calvinistic interpretation the following points need to be considered.

(1) This portion of Scripture is an allegory, *not* a straightforward didactic passage. Therefore, one should not use this section of the Bible to overturn the numerous clear portions of God's word that define the atonement, union with Christ, sanctification and perseverance. "These verses, we must carefully remember, contain a parable. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule which applies to all Christ's parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. The mistakes into which Christians have fallen by neglecting this rule, are neither few nor small."<sup>54</sup>

That a literal detailed theological system should not be based on this allegory apart from the analogy of Scripture is evident from the following. First, the part of the allegory which speaks of the Father removing every unfruitful branch sounds as if every unfruitful branch is removed from the church in history. The truth of the matter is that most hypocrites are never discovered, dealt with or excommunicated at all. They are not dealt with nor exposed until the day of judgment. Secondly, the passage says the Father is the "husbandman" who takes away the unfruitful branches and burns them. If (as many believe) this statement is a reference to the judgment of unregenerate sinners, then there is another problem, for God's word says, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (Jn 5:22). If the details of the allegory are not meant to be taken literally, then obviously it is ludicrous to use this section of Scripture as a primary support for a whole new paradigm in theology.

(2) It is exegetically and theologically irresponsible to interpret John 15:1-10 in a manner that contradicts many clear teachings of Scripture including the explicit teaching of John's gospel itself (e.g., Jn. 10:26-30; 17:11; 6:37-39). While the Auburn "theologians" arrogantly mock the Puritan understanding of the text, they are in the embarrassing position of simultaneously holding to mutually-exclusive doctrines. One should never interpret Scripture in a manner that makes one part blatantly contradict another.

The Auburn interpretation is not substantially different than the standard Arminian interpretation. The only difference between the Arminian and the Auburn view is the Monroe Four's arbitrary idea that *some but not all genuine* believers receive an additional gift of perseverance. The Auburn "theologians" either need to abandon the idea that real believers can fall away and go to hell; or, they must abandon perseverance and Calvinism. The Auburn "theologians" would rather hold to a blatant contradiction than abandon baptismal regeneration and their perversion of the covenant. Ryle's warning fits the Auburn perversion of John 15 perfectly. "The sentence [in v. 2] is the favorite weapon of all Arminians, of all who maintain an inseparable connection between grace and baptism [sound familiar?], and all who deny the perseverance of the saints."<sup>55</sup>

(3) Within the allegory of the vine and the branches there is recognition on the part of Christ that true Christians are clean. In other words Jesus understood and taught that not all branches or *professing* Christians are regenerated, justified and made holy. To the eleven disciples He said, "You are clean because of the word of God that I have spoken to you (v. 3)."

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<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:105.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:111.

Christ in a former chapter, had told his disciples, that they were *clean, but not all*, because the betrayer was among them' [cf. Jn. 13:10-11].<sup>56</sup> Now that Judas had removed himself, our Lord could tell the eleven apostles what sort of branches they were. They were not fruitless branches but clean ones. The eleven are "assured that they are fruitful branches, really and internally grafted in Christ; and so were they regenerated, justified, and sanctified in part."<sup>57</sup> "In ver. 3 Jesus declares to the disciples that He ranks them in the second class of branches, and no longer in the first."<sup>58</sup>

(4) In a similar allegory where our Lord discusses good and bad fruit, Jesus makes it very clear that the people who bear bad fruit never were regenerated, saved or forgiven. People bear bad fruit because they are bad. "You will know them [false prophets] by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt. 7:16-19). Spurgeon writes, "Every man produces according to his nature; he cannot do otherwise. *Good tree, good fruit; corrupt tree, evil fruit*. There is no possibility of the effect being higher and better than the cause. The truly good does not bring forth evil; it would be contrary to nature. The radically bad never rises to produce good, though it may seem to do so. Therefore the one and the other may be known by the special fruit of each."<sup>59</sup> What this means is that those who are said to be connected to the vine yet produce bad fruit cannot possibly be united to Christ by the Holy Spirit and regenerated or made holy. If a person was united to Christ and His merits in this sense, then he could not produce bad fruit. Therefore, some professing Christians are united to Jesus in an external sense by baptism, profession of faith, and church membership, yet they are not internally united by the Holy Spirit (the mystical union). The merits of Christ do not remove the guilt or the power of their sins.

(5) Ironically a favorite Auburn proof text (Rom. 11:15-22) actually disproves their concept of membership in the covenant and union with Christ. In this section of Scripture the apostle uses an illustration regarding an olive tree and its branches. In this illustration Paul continues his explanation of what went wrong with the Jews and warns Gentile believers not to be prideful in the church. There are several things to note in this section of Scripture. First, the root of the olive tree is Abraham and the patriarchs. Not only was the Abrahamic covenant established with the sign and seal of circumcision, but Abraham is the father of all who believe whether Jews or Gentiles. Secondly, there is only one church or one people of God. There is only one olive tree. Many Jews were broken off of the tree because of unbelief, while many Gentiles were grafted into the tree because of their profession of faith in Christ. Thirdly, the fact that one is in the tree or the visible church gives no occasion for boasting, because faith removes all grounds for boasting. The people who have been grafted into the tree stand by faith not human works or merit. The people who have been removed from the tree were removed because they did not believe. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith" (Rom 3:27). Fourthly, believers are exhorted to continue in God's goodness. They are to continue in the faith. Murray writes, "There is no such thing as continuance in the favour of God in spite of apostasy; God's saving embrace and endurance are correlative. In another

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<sup>56</sup> John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1809]), 2:66.

<sup>57</sup> George Hutcheson, *The Gospel of John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1657]), 315.

<sup>58</sup> Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978 [1886]), 854.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1987), 82.

connection Paul enunciates the same kind of condition. We are reconciled to God and assured of being presented holy and unrepugnant only if we ‘continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel’ (Col. 1:23; cf. Heb. 3:6, 14).”<sup>60</sup>

According to the Auburn paradigm everyone who is baptized is regenerated, truly united to Christ (i.e., not merely united in an external manner to the visible church), forgiven, loved by God in a saving manner, and so forth. Paul, however, held to an entirely different viewpoint. Note that people are cut off from the tree because of unbelief. This means that the apostle held precisely to the opinion that there are people in the visible church who are not regenerate, saved or forgiven at all. Israel (or the old covenant expression of the visible church) contained believers and unbelievers—Jacob and Esau, the elect and non-elect. Among the mass of Israelites there was a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 9:27ff., 11:5). There was Israel and true Israel (Rom. 9:6). The olive tree contained unbelieving, non-regenerate branches. Yes, they were truly part of the tree or the visible expression of the kingdom. However, they were never savingly united to Christ. To assert that they were truly and spiritually united to Jesus is to read more into the passage than it can possibly bear. Once again the Auburn “theologians” are going beyond the simple point of Paul’s illustration because of their perverted view of baptism and the covenant. Boice writes, “The most common of all errors in studying parables or illustrations . . . is to press them beyond the simple, single point of the illustration. Sometimes people do that by overly stressing the illustration’s details. At other times they treat the stories too literally.”<sup>61</sup>

One can only argue against the traditional Reformed view of the olive tree by asserting that people can be regenerated and possess true saving faith (and thus be justified in God’s sight) one moment and then be unregenerate and damned the next. Further, the context indicates that many Israelites were not elect individually or united to Christ and thus were hated, hardened and rejected by God (Rom. 9:13 ff.). This position of Scripture is incomprehensible and contradictory to Paul’s own teaching in the book of Romans, if we adhere to the Auburn doctrine. But doesn’t Paul assume that real believers can fall away? No, not at all! Hodge writes,

There is nothing in the language inconsistent with the doctrine of the final perseverance of believers, even supposing the passage to refer to individuals; for it is very common to speak thus hypothetically, and say that an event cannot or will not come to pass, unless the requisite means are employed, when the occurrence of the event had been rendered certain by the previous purpose and promise of God; see Acts xxvii. 31. The foundation of all such statements is the simple truth, that He who purposes the end, purposes also the means; and he brings about the end by securing the use of the means. And when rational agents are concerned, he secures the use of the means by rational considerations presented to their minds, and rendered effectual by his grace, when the end contemplated is good. This passage, however, has no legitimate bearing on this subject. Paul is not speaking of the connection of individual believers with Christ, which he had abundantly taught in chapter viii. and elsewhere, to be indissoluble, but of the relation of communities to the church and its various privileges. There is no promise or covenant on the part of God, securing to the Gentiles the enjoyment of these blessings through all generations, any more than there was any such promise to protect the Jews from the consequences of their unbelief. The continuance of these favours depends the conduct of each successive generation. Paul therefore says to the Gentile, that he must continue in the divine favour, “otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:88.

<sup>61</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 3:1344.

<sup>62</sup>Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1835]), 370.

Once again, we see no need whatsoever of abandoning traditional Reformed theology with its concept of the visible and invisible church in favor of incomprehensible, illogical and unbiblical nonsense.

## The Issue of Assurance

An analysis of the Auburn paradigm would not be complete without a discussion of assurance.<sup>63</sup> The reason the doctrine of assurance is important is because the new Auburn theology alleges to be the answer to desperate assurance problems in the Reformed community. These problems relating to assurance supposedly flow from a faulty view of baptism and the covenant.

What are these terrible problems relating to assurance? What is their root cause? The Auburn lectures discuss three main problem areas. First, there is a discussion of the New England Puritans' attempt to have a regenerate church membership and the disastrous consequences of such an attempt (e.g., the half-way covenant, Unitarianism, etc.). Secondly, certain small Reformed denominations from a Dutch background are mentioned which have a serious problem of assurance among the congregants (e.g., in a Netherlands Reformed Church, out of a congregation with 700 church members, perhaps only about 30 people on average will partake of communion). Thirdly, modern conservative Presbyterians are accused of inciting a crisis and spiritually starving their covenant children because they don't accept or believe in baptismal regeneration and thus expect a conversion experience in their children before they become communicant members. (This accusation is related to the acceptance by the Auburn "theologians" [except perhaps Schlissel] of the false, Romanizing doctrine of paedocommunion.)

Before we examine the unbiblical and irrational proposals of the Auburn "theologians" to the supposed crises in modern Reformed thought regarding assurance, we must point out the utter irrelevance of the examples set forth by these men to the situation of modern conservative Presbyterianism. In other words, the big "crises" add up to nothing more than a straw man. This point is easily established by briefly examining their examples.

It is true that the New England Puritans attempted for a time to have a regenerate church membership. People were required to keep spiritual diaries and jump through many burdensome hoops before they could become communicant members. It is also true that such practices contributed to the destruction of biblical Christianity in New England.<sup>64</sup> Such practices, however, are explicitly rejected by the Westminster Standards and were *never* a problem among conservative Presbyterians. Confessional Presbyterian churches do not attempt to read the heart

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<sup>63</sup>“The true church is the church in history, the gathering or throng of all professing households assembled in the covenant around the word in Christ's sacraments whether they understand that or not. Okay, they are not saved by works, they are not saved by passing a test. They are saved because of their connection to Christ and if they have that connection to Christ they're saved. And if that connection with Christ is severed and he is the one who severs it...” (Doug Wilson, *The Curses of the Covenant*, tape 7).

<sup>64</sup>The New England experience seems to have been somewhat unique even among Puritans. Edmund S. Morgan states: “I know of no instance in which a Puritan minister, before the founding of New England, actually did attempt to test the faith of communicants” (Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963], 76). The attempt to have a regenerate church membership, rather than being an established and widespread practice, seems to have begun in New England and spread back to England. “My contention is that the practice came, not from Plymouth to Massachusetts as initially supposed, nor from England or Holland as presently assumed, but that it originated in Massachusetts among the nonseparating Puritans there and spread from Massachusetts to Plymouth, Connecticut, New Haven, and back to England” (Ibid, 65).

and determine if a person is truly regenerate or not. Rather, they ask for a credible profession of faith (25:2). While there may be a “Reformed” Baptist church here and there that has a similar problem, the peculiarities of the New England Puritans (who were Congregationalists) have *absolutely nothing* to do with conservative Presbyterianism.

Also, it is true that some small, strict, Reformed denominations with a Dutch background do indeed have a problem in their congregations with assurance that causes many believers to wrongly avoid the Lord’s supper. Such a problem, however, (once again) has nothing to do with modern conservative Presbyterian churches. Perhaps the reason that Presbyterians have not encountered the problems of some of the small, strict, experimental Dutch Reformed groups is that the Westminster Standards deal with this very issue in such a clear biblical manner (e.g., see the answer to question 172 in the Larger Catechism).

What about the accusation that modern Presbyterians are no different than Baptists because they expect a conversion experience before their covenant children are admitted to communicant membership? While there may be a Presbyterian church here and there (of which this author is unaware) that has been influenced by evangelicalism with these procedures, such a practice is clearly unconfessional. The Confession requires a credible *profession* of faith, not a conversion experience. The reason for this requirement is obvious. Many or most covenant children cannot discern a time when they did not believe in and love Jesus Christ. If there are conservative Presbyterian churches that require some type of conversion experience for communicant membership, then they need to repent and return to confessional orthodoxy. This author (who has been a member in PCA, OPC, RPCUS and RPCNA churches) is unaware of any requirement for a conversion experience in conservative Presbyterian denominations.

Having established that there is no crisis in conservative Presbyterian theology with regard to assurance, let us turn our attention to the bizarre Auburn remedy for the non-existent problem. The answer to the “problem,” we are told, is a new paradigm which sets forth the objectivity of the covenant. Reformed people need to understand that baptism really saves. That is, people who are baptized are regenerated, united to Christ, forgiven, loved by Christ, and are elect. Christians (we are told) should not doubt or lack assurance because we can look to our baptism and the objectivity of the covenant. Since baptism is efficacious, and we really are partakers of the covenant of grace, assurance is ours. There is no need to worry whether or not we are truly regenerate or not. If the Auburn “theologians” stopped at this point, then there could be no question that assurance belonged to everyone baptized because everyone baptized is really saved and united to Christ. The problem with the Auburn view at this point is that it teaches both sacramentalism and universalism (if consistent) with regard to all those baptized.

The Auburn “theologians,” however, do not stop here but go on to discuss the sad fact that real Christians who are truly united to Christ can fall away, apostatize and go to hell. There are people (we are told) who are saved but who do not receive the gift of perseverance. What is the problem with this view? Aside from the fact it totally contradicts the doctrine of the atonement (as noted above), it also destroys the Auburn solution to the “problem” of assurance.

How does it destroy assurance? First, the idea that real Christians can fall away explicitly contradicts their own idea that baptism is always efficacious. The Auburn “theologians” must either return to the traditional Reformed view that baptism is only efficacious in the elect (i.e., those for whom Christ died, who receive the gift of faith and repentance) or they must admit that baptism is not really efficacious after all. The confessional view (that the non-elect are baptized and become members of the visible church but are not regenerated or united to Christ by the Holy Spirit) cannot be avoided without holding to absurd contradictions. The idea that we must

look to our baptism for assurance, when baptism guarantees nothing (if we do not receive the additional gift of perseverance), is ludicrous. How (we ask) does a denial of the Reformed understanding of election and perseverance strengthen assurance? How does a real union with Christ that does not actually save in all cases strengthen our assurance? Why should we look to our baptism for assurance when most people who are baptized apostatize and go to hell?

Secondly, the Auburn teaching that only people in the church *who receive the additional gift of perseverance* are truly saved and go to heaven, renders all their talk about the objectivity of the covenant and assurance superfluous. To tell people not to worry about assurance because their baptism really unites them to Christ and saves them; but then to qualify such a promise with the statement: “well, you might be eternally saved *only* if you receive the additional gift of perseverance,” is not reassuring at all. Further, how are a series of irrational, contradictory teachings supposed to eliminate a crisis related to assurance? The idea that baptism is efficacious in all cases, yet many baptized people apostatize and go to hell, is not reassuring. The doctrine that everyone baptized is united to Jesus and is forgiven by His precious blood, yet many or most baptized forgiven people go to hell, is not reassuring at all. A baptism that is both efficacious and non-efficacious is not a solid foundation for assurance. An atonement that only temporarily forgives, that doesn’t get the job done for most baptized people, is not reassuring. The idea that many or most people in the church who are united to Christ have the ability successfully to resist the saving power of the Holy Spirit and thus end up in the lake of fire is not comforting. If salvation is dependent upon our own ability to persevere (because the Spirit’s application of redemption to those united to Christ is truly resistible), then folks, it’s nail-biting time. The Auburnite attempts to solve a non-existent problem have resulted in one of the most unbiblical, irrational and absurd theological systems to come out of the Reformed camp in decades.<sup>65</sup> What they have accomplished for Reformed theology is akin to what the Three Stooges have accomplished for plumbing or baking. The Auburn “theologians” have proclaimed a new, improved theology, a reforming paradigm, yet what they offer is a crossbreed of an old defective sacramentalism, aspects of Arminianism and a Romanizing concept of salvation. What is particularly dangerous about their system is: a) these men claim to be faithful to the Reformed system of doctrine; b) their heretical teachings are mixed with orthodox Reformed doctrines; c) many people in Reformed churches do not have the theological training to readily identify perversions of apostolic doctrine. We can only hope and pray that the small, conservative Presbyterian denominations will have the courage to discipline anyone who spreads these Romanizing doctrines in their churches.

## Summary and Conclusion

A brief examination of many of the peculiarities of the Auburn system reveals a new paradigm in theology that is a radical, heretical departure from the Reformed faith. By way of summary, note the following departures from Reformed orthodoxy.

(1) The Auburn system perverts the doctrine of the atonement by rendering the blood of Christ non-efficacious in most cases and by separating the foundation or ground of salvation (the active and passive obedience of Jesus) from its application. Further, a number of statements at

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<sup>65</sup>Note, that the first epistle of John, which has as one of its central themes a believer’s assurance of salvation (e.g., 1 Jn. 5:13, “that you may know that you have eternal life”) does not mention water baptism or baptismal regeneration even once. The apostle is apparently unaware that the way to deal with problems of assurance is to point believers to their regeneration at baptism and the objectivity of the covenant.

the Auburn conference can only be interpreted as a denial of justification alone. The attempt of the Auburn speakers to wed sacramentalism, medieval concepts of mother church, and Arminian-style concepts of perseverance to the Reformed doctrine of atonement, has resulted in a mass of contradictions and great confusion.

(2) The Auburn speakers repeatedly violate standard orthodox principles of biblical interpretation. Parabolic or allegorical sections of Scripture are used to overturn many explicit, didactic passages in the Bible. Further, the idea that our exegesis needs to be directed to some extent by systematic theology and simple principles of logic is rejected in favor of adhering to blatantly contradictory positions. To assert that orthodox Reformed pastors are rationalists, Gnostics or guilty of “orthodusty” because they refuse to make Scripture contradict itself is *ad hominum* rhetoric.

(3) The Auburn paradigm destroys the biblical understanding of assurance by placing man’s hope in a baptism that “regenerates” but does not really save anyone unless he receives the additional gift of perseverance. People are simultaneously taught that everyone baptized is elect and truly united to Christ, but most people baptized go to hell because they do not receive the additional gift of perseverance. Anyone with a little common sense is left wondering if they have the added gift of perseverance. The Auburn system leaves people with a far greater anxiety than any overemphasis of the Puritans. Further, the dozens of passages which teach the perseverance of the saints and thus strengthen our faith in Christ’s saving power are rejected in favor of an Arminian type of interpretation.

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(4) The Auburn “theologians” adhere to a non-Reformed (i.e., Lutheran–high church Episcopalian style) understanding of baptism. These men would say that they totally reject an *ex opere operato* understanding of the sacraments. Nevertheless, their position places them squarely in the Romish camp because they repeatedly assert that baptism is efficacious apart from faith. The Auburn system asserts that the sign of baptism and the reality it symbolizes are always coterminous. However, since many or most baptized people will end up in hell, one could say that for the Monroe Four, baptism is simultaneously efficacious and non-efficacious in most cases. This assertion (of course) is utter nonsense. But when developing a new paradigm in theology, little things like logic, coherence, and systematic theology should not intrude on such superior intellectual pursuits!

(5) The Auburn theology rejects the orthodox distinction between the visible and invisible church in favor of the idea that everyone baptized is saved, forgiven, elect, and united to Christ; but many of the loved, forgiven saints end up in the pit of hell because they are not given the gift of perseverance. This position contradicts Scripture which repeatedly teaches that people who apostatize were never really saved (Mt. 7:23; 1 Jn. 2:19; 2 Pet. 2:22), that God hates and hardens the non-elect who are in the visible church (Rom. 9:11-13, 18ff.; 11:5), that God has a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 9:17ff.). Indeed, the biblical doctrine of the church is incomprehensible without such a distinction. Bannerman’s comments on the invisible church reveal the fidelity of the standard Reformed view. He writes,

The church invisible stands, with respect to its members, in an inward and spiritual relationship to Christ, whereas the Church visible stands to Him in an outward relationship only. In so far as the Church invisible is concerned, the truth of this statement will be readily admitted by all. There can be no difference of opinion on the point. The proper party with whom the covenant of grace is made, and to whom its promises and privileges belong, is the invisible Church of real believers. It is this Church for which Christ died. It is this Church that is espoused to Him as the Bride. It is the members of this Church that are each and all savingly united to Him as their Head. The bond of communion between them and the Saviour is an invisible and spiritual one, securing to all of them the enjoyment of saving blessings here, and the promise of everlasting redemption hereafter. None but Romanists deny or ignore this.<sup>66</sup>

(6) The Auburn paradigm makes continued faithfulness to the covenant an instrument of justification along with faith. According to the Auburn theology, everyone in the visible church (our term, not theirs) who is baptized in the name of the triune God is saved (i.e., united to Christ, forgiven, receives the Holy Spirit, etc.). But only those Christians who continue in faithfulness actually go to heaven. The rest apostatize and go to hell. Therefore, according to the Auburn paradigm, the main issue in laying hold of the merits of Jesus is *not* faith but continued faithfulness to the conditions of the covenant. (Keep in mind that Wilkins speaks of the passages which discuss a mere temporary, historical, non-genuine, non-saving faith as signifying real genuine saving faith. He does this to support his contention that genuine Christians can fall away and go to hell.) The Auburn speakers’ adoption of a Romanist interpretation of James; their rejection of the traditional view of perseverance; their doctrine of baptismal regeneration coupled with their Shepherdite perversion of justification, has left them with a Romanist-style doctrine of salvation.

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<sup>66</sup>James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1960 [1869]), 1:29-30.

The Bible does teach that only those who persevere will go to heaven. However, it also teaches that faith is the sole instrument of our justification; that good works are *evidence* of saving faith and that everyone for whom Jesus died will persevere because progressive sanctification and perseverance are inseparable from our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Perseverance is applied by the Holy Spirit to believers on account of the merits of the Savior. Once a person believes, he is really saved (i.e., he is justified and has eternal life); such a person will persevere because of what our Lord accomplished. He cannot fall away. People who fall away were never justified to begin with. For the Auburn “theologians” the main issue is not false versus genuine faith but rather who continues to live in faithfulness to the covenant. Like Romanism, the Auburn teaching confounds justification with sanctification and makes man’s activity the ultimate deciding factor in salvation. *The orthodox doctrine is that we are not justified because we persevere. We persevere because we are justified, because the merits of Christ are ours.* Christ is the author and finisher of our faith. R. Scott Clark writes, “To add an element to *sola fide* is self-detracting. Faith is *simple*, it is pure, it is alone, because it looks only to Christ who is our only righteousness. To add obedience to faith as an instrument is to corrupt it by changing the instrument and its object. If there are two parts, faith and works, then there are two objects Christ and my own obedience. This seemingly minor modification is fatal to our entire faith.”<sup>67</sup>

Reformed believers need to be made aware that the Auburn paradigm is a radical departure from the Reformed faith. It is not a refining of Reformed doctrine but rather a rejection of confessional orthodoxy in favor of sacramentalist, Arminian and Romanizing concepts. It is heretical because it strikes at the very heart of Reformed theology—the doctrines of the atonement and justification by faith alone. May God protect his precious church from this vile theological poison.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>R. Scott Clark, *The Danger of a Falling Church*, internet article originally published in *The Outlook* 50 (July/August 2001): 21-2.

<sup>68</sup> This chapter was written in late 2002, early 2003, in response to the 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastors Conference. It was originally published in *The New Southern Presbyterian Review*, Summer 2004.